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THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST

CONSIDERED,

IN REFERENCE TO ITS

MEMBERS, OBJECTS, DUTIES, OFFICERS,
GOVERNMENT, AND DISCIPLINE.

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

THE little volume now presented to the reader is the result of some fear, on the one hand, that the principles of Congregational Dissent are not even by many of the members of our own body so thoroughly understood as could be wished; and of a strong conviction, on the other, of their truth, and importance, and powerfully practical tendency. We are not unaware that some good men have been accustomed to regard the distinctive tenets held by different sections of the great general body of evangelical Christians as speculative principles, which, in the experience of those who hold them, can contribute in no degree to promote spirituality of mind, and thus to augment their power of doing good. Were the correctness of this opinion conceded, it would follow that all discussion of such principles might cease, and perhaps should cease. The present writer does not, however, make this concession. He is persuaded, on the contrary, that they are powerfully adapted to develop and improve character,—to separate the precious from the vile; to promote caution, watchfulness, humility, love, zeal, and enterprise; to elicit, and to give the stay and support of habit to all those holy affections which the Spirit of God implants in the hearts of his

people, and to prepare them for a more splendid career of moral improvement when mortality shall have been swallowed up of life. If we do not now reap a full harvest of benefit from them, the sole reason, as the Author cannot but think, is, that by a part, perhaps a considerable part of the body, they are but imperfectly understood, or but feebly held. Let them only obtain, as we trust they will, a firmer establishment in the intelligent confidence of the members of the denomination at large, and especially let them be brought more vigorously into action, and, unless the writer is greatly mistaken, their abundant spiritual fruit will speedily show, with a power of evidence not to be resisted, that they form integrant parts of that revelation the ultimate design of which, in relation to man at least, is to transform him into the image of his Maker.

It is not, perhaps, impossible that some portion of this defective acquaintance with the principles of Congregational dissent, is the incidental result of one, especially, of those noble institutions which form the moral glory of our land. Since the establishment of Missionary and Bible Societies, churchmen and dissenters have mingled with one another more frequently than formerly, and loved one another more fervently. Our own brethren especially, rejoicing in this improved state of feeling, have, as a body, exercised the greatest caution to avoid every thing which might possibly abate the warmth of the newly-kindled fraternal affection. They have even been content to sacrifice the interest of their own denomination, or, as it would be more correct to say, to hold in practical abeyance that portion of

truth which is to be found in the distinctive principles of their denomination, lest they should give offence to those with whom they had been so recently brought to co-operate, and drive the new visitants to their places of worship—brought thither through the indirect operation of the great Christian societies to which reference has been made—back again to what would not have been, in some cases at least, “a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees well refined.”

Now, whatever may be thought of this course of proceeding itself, we must applaud the motive which led to it. It was not possible, perhaps, to anticipate *formerly* all the consequences to which it might lead; little doubt can remain *now* that, as one of its actual results, a new generation—both of ministers and people—has sprung up among us, whose members have less knowledge of their principles than their predecessors possessed—who hold them with a less tenacious grasp—and who are, consequently, far more likely to abandon them when personal ambition has been disappointed, or when temptation presents its golden bait to draw the simple or the sordid astray.

It is not likely that any reflecting person among us will regard this as a sound state of the ecclesiastical body; all, it is presumed, will allow that some curative process is desirable. Now what process can present so strong a probability of success, as a return to the good old way of training up our congregations, and especially the young amongst them, in the knowledge of those great principles of Nonconformity, to the value as well as the truth of which so many of our pious forefathers set the seal of their blood?

It is quite impossible that any upright and candid man can blame us for doing this. Believing, as we do, and as it is known that we do, that our distinctive tenets form integrant parts of Divine truth, are we not bound to inculcate them? How can we keep silence, and yield, at the same time, full obedience to conscience and to God? If, indeed, we could adopt the wild latitudinarianism which seems at least to maintain that, on non-essential points in religion, revelation is itself defective—not furnishing a rule sufficiently explicit even for perfectly honest and impartial inquirers—if we could think that the New Testament leaves it really uncertain whether a Christian church should be a heterogeneous mixture of the pious and the profane—whether it should be in a position of alliance or not, with the state—whether the power of government should be vested in the civil ruler, or in a few diocesan bishops, or whether every Christian congregation possesses it entire within itself—whether liberty of approach to the Lord's table should be restricted to those who are apparently the Lord's people, or be granted to all,—there would, in that case, be no reason why we should not hold our peace. We could not be bound to speak if revelation were silent. What, indeed, should we have to say, since the Christian minister is to inculcate that only which he finds (though the whole of what he finds) in Divine revelation? In the case supposed, the distinctive tenets of Churchmen and Dissenters would be mere *opinions*, not *principles* held in subjection to Divine authority; and the liberality of both, (if there were the appearance of liberality,) resulting as it must do from the conviction that the opinions of neither party

stood on the basis of Scripture, could be nothing better than a base counterfeit, and not the genuine coin.

All such latitudinarianism we, however, disclaim. We believe, and the Author is now giving expression to the opinion of many others as well as his own, that the principles of Congregational Dissent rest on inspired authority; and we consequently feel, and powerfully feel, that we must prove unfaithful servants, if, while giving to the weightier matters of the law that prominence which their higher importance demands, we neglect to inculcate what in our judgment revelation teaches in reference to the lesser matters of the law. We cannot forget that to the command to preach the Gospel to every creature, addressed by Christ to the apostles, he himself added the injunction, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Compliance with this injunction on our part, assuming as we do that it is done with Christian temper and spirit, does not furnish just ground of offence to those with whom we happen to differ in our views of ecclesiastical polity, or in reference to any point the belief of which is not essential to salvation. We cannot persuade ourselves to think so injuriously of the great body of our Christian brethren of other denominations as to imagine for a moment that offence will be taken; and, if in regard to a few individuals our hopes on this point should be disappointed, and they should be found so unreasonable as to require us to refrain from discharging a duty as the condition of their continued co-operation, we should honestly, though courteously, tell them that they set too high a price upon their favours; that we are willing to make any sacrifice to maintain fraternal affection between

ourselves and them, except the sacrifice of a single grain of Divine truth, or our practical liberty to teach it to our own people.

The author is not without his apprehensions that some persons, both Churchmen and Dissenters, are apt to think it impossible to hold their sentiments on minor points, *as an act of subjection to Divine revelation*, and at the same time to exercise Christian forbearance and love to those who differ from them on those points! He has, at any rate, met with individuals who seemed to imagine that they must either be latitudinarians or bigots. No error could be greater than this. It receives no countenance from the word of God. It is contradicted by fact; for, paradoxical as it might at first view appear, it will be found to be the case, generally at least, that the most liberal men are those who have been most careful to gather all their opinions from revelation. Conscientious themselves, they conceive others to be so, and respect them on that account. It mistakes the nature of Christian liberality, and founds it on the wrong basis. Christian liberality does not rest on the assumption that there is, correctly speaking, no right and wrong in reference to distinctive tenets; or, in other words, that men, equally honest and impartial, equally free from any bias which might improperly influence the judgment, equally humble and devout, might, on examining the New Testament, form different opinions in reference to the nature of a church, the character of its members, the mode of its government, &c.; for in that case Divine revelation, so it appears to us at least, would be chargeable, from its want of explicitness, with all the evils which have resulted from the

division of the Christian church into sects and parties. Let us throw the blame of this, as far as it involves blame, upon man, and not upon God. (Vide p. 102.) Christian liberality ought not to be founded on latitudinarianism; nor upon any such falsely assumed obscurity or deficiency in Divine revelation; but on the well-grounded distinction which exists between essential and non-essential truths in religion: or, in other words, between those truths, the belief of which is necessary to acceptance with God, and to the formation of the Christian character, and those which are not essential to either. It supposes both unity and diversity. Unity in essential truths; diversity in minor ones; and without either of these it could not exist. If among believers there were found perfect identity of opinion, there would be no opportunity for the exercise of liberality. If all religious sentiments were essential points, it would be impossible to exercise it. A field is required for its manifestation; yet there are boundaries which it cannot overleap, and limits within which it cannot be confined. It cannot expatiate without the line of essential truth; nor confine its actings to any single spot within that line. Christian liberality, in short, loves none who do not love Christ, and *all who do*. Overlooking all minor differences of opinion, it fixes upon this single point of identity as the grand attaching and uniting principle. It admits, indeed, that diversity of sentiment, even on subordinate points, must be ascribed to ignorance, prejudice, &c.; yet, maintaining that these causes of mistake may co-exist with general uprightness of mind, and habitual subjection to conscience and to

God, it gives with the heart of Christian love the right hand of Christian fellowship.

No person, then, who understands the nature of Christian liberality, will be disposed to consider, as at variance with it, either a firm conviction of the truth of the great principles of Congregational Dissent, or a temperate and Christian advocacy of these principles. To the latter, we venture to urge the ministers of our denomination. Somewhat has, indeed, been done by individuals, but chiefly in the way of controversy; and therefore less likely to operate powerfully upon the body at large. The measure most especially to be desired at present, is the more private and pastoral inculcation of our principles in our own congregations. Sufficient opportunities of doing this will present themselves to those who may think that such subjects should be avoided on the Lord's day,—though it deserves consideration, whether even then it can be either improper or inexpedient to inculcate the spiritual nature of the kingdom of Christ, together with certain other topics, which must be classed with the distinctive tenets of our system. The leavening influence of Dissent upon the country at large has not been proportioned to our numbers; and chiefly, it is conceived, on account of the feeble grasp with which too many amongst us hold their own principles. To the same cause, also, must be ascribed certain practical evils which exist in the body. These, in most cases, are evils of administration,—the result of ignorance; not radical imperfections of the system; and it were, consequently, most unwise to think of abandoning it for another, of the probable prac-

tical working of which, in this country, we cannot form an enlightened judgment. Before we attempt to remedy these evils, let this be done in the first place :—Let our churches be more fully instructed on this point ; be led to see more distinctly *how* Congregational principles should be brought into action ; and then proceed, with wisdom, and prudence, and Christian love, to carry theory into practice ; and the result, it is confidently expected, will prove that they are more powerfully adapted than any other to promote those great spiritual purposes which it is the design of every system of ecclesiastical polity to secure.

The Author has endeavoured to supply what has been thought by many to be a desideratum. How far he has succeeded others must be left to judge. He has been desirous that the price of the book should throw it within the easy reach of the members of our churches generally. Some topics have accordingly not been introduced, and others not enlarged upon, to secure this object. Designed for the whole of the Congregational body, it does not touch, it will be observed, upon the subject of baptism.

THE NATURE
OF A
CHRISTIAN CHURCH,
&c.

SECTION I.

THE MEANING OF THE TERM CHURCH.

THE Greek word *ἐκκλησία*, translated church, simply means an assembly. There is nothing to restrict its application to an assembly of a specific character; though, recollecting that it is derived from *ἐκκαλεῖν*, to call out from, we can hardly think it right to employ it to designate a casual meeting of individuals. It properly denotes a regularly called or organized body. Its employment, indeed, Acts xix. 31, to denote the multitude tumultuously gathered together in the theatre of Ephesus, might seem, at first view, at variance with the preceding statement. Let it be remembered, however, that the assembly itself was a judicial one, how irregularly soever its members took their places in it.

In the New Testament, however, the term church is most generally restricted in its application to religious assemblies; and within this limit it has two, and only two, distinct and undoubted significations.

First, it denotes the great assembly or congregation of redeemed and sanctified men which will meet at length in heaven. Strictly speaking, they will not constitute a church till they arrive in heaven; they are, however, so called now by anticipation. In this sense

the word church is used in the following passages :—
 “Feed,” said Paul to the bishops of the church at Ephesus, “the church of God,” or the Lord, i. e. the multitude to be finally redeemed by him, “which he has purchased with his own blood.” Acts xx. 28. Again, “But ye are come to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven,” Heb. xii. 23. The reader may refer also, for further instances of the use of the word church in this sense, to Heb. ii. 12; 1 Cor. xii. 28; Col. i. 18.

Secondly. It denotes a particular assembly or congregation of persons of this description, meeting statedly for religious purposes on earth. “And so,” says the sacred historian, “were the churches,” i. e., the particular congregations of believers which had been collected in the cities referred to in the fourth verse, “established in the faith.” Acts xvi. 5. Again, 1 Cor. xvi. 19, “The churches of Asia,” i. e. the individual Christian congregations, “salute you.” Again, Rom. xvi. 23, “Gaius mine host, and of the whole church,” i. e. the congregation of the believers, “saluteth you.” Again, Acts ix. 31, “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria,” &c., i. e. the various Christian congregations. The term cannot mean denominations, for surely there were not innumerable denominations of Christians in existence at those places, and at that period. Again, 1 Cor. xiv. 23, “If, therefore, the whole church,” i. e. congregation of believers, “be come together into one place,” &c. Finally, we refer to Acts xiv. 23, “And when they had ordained them elders in every church,” i. e. surely, congregation, &c. &c.

The word church means thus a single congregation, or the whole body of the redeemed. There are, indeed, other senses in which it is currently employed by certain religious denominations, though without, as we think, the authority of Divine revelation. Some, for example, use it to denote the material edifice, in which the as-

sembly or congregation meets; a mode of employing the term founded on a rhetorical figure, in which the container is put for the thing contained. The prevalent use of the word in this sense is much, we think, to be regretted, since it has led multitudes to forget that a Christian church cannot consist of unconscious matter, of bricks, stone, and mortar, but of the rational and immortal beings who present their sacrifices to God within the edifice framed of such materials. Hence, the Apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, "The churches of Asia," (could they be buildings?) "salute you." "Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house," 1 Cor. xvi. 19. Others, again, employ the term church to denote a number of congregations, which, maintaining the same faith and order, and rendering subjection to the same ecclesiastical jurisdiction, are regarded as one body. Thus we talk of the Episcopalian church, the Presbyterian church, &c. &c. There does not, however, occur one clear undoubted instance of the use of the term in this sense in the New Testament. By the application of conjectural reasoning to certain passages, which shall be carefully examined when we treat of the government of the church, it may, perhaps, be made to appear possible to understand the term as it occurs in them in this sense; but it may also be taken in its ordinary sense, and accordingly we are bound, by an established law of criticism, to understand it in that sense. It cannot be denied, without an outrageous violation of candour, that the customary phraseology of the New Testament is at variance with the use of the word church now objected against; or that its ordinary sense is a separate or single congregation. The sacred writers employ the plural term when they address more congregations than one. Paul wrote "to the church of God at Corinth," but to "the churches of Galatia;" and John addressed himself "to the seven churches," i. e. congregations, not, surely, denominations, "in Asia."

Finally, others employ the term church to denote the office-bearers of a Christian congregation, or of a denomination, in distinction from the body of the faithful. To support the Presbyterian mode of church government, this meaning must indeed be given to the term. Nothing, however, can be more vicious than the mode of reasoning resorted to by those who thus explain it. To prove the Divine authority of Presbyterianism, the point to be established, they attach to the word church, in certain passages, a sense perfectly uncalled for,—which it does not bear in other passages, and which is, moreover, in direct contradiction to scriptural usage; for it is remarkable that, though the New Testament does not, in any other passages than those referred to, (we deny, of course, that it does even in these,) employ the term church to denote the office-bearers in contradistinction from the body of the faithful, it does use it more than once to distinguish the body from the office-bearers. Thus, when Paul and Barnabus went up from Antioch to Jerusalem, we are told that, on their arrival, “they were received of the church;” and, as if to guard us against conceiving that the term denotes here the office-bearers, the historian immediately adds, “and of the apostles and elders.” The church at Jerusalem was then the body of the faithful.

A church of Christ is not then a denomination, but a single congregation of Christians. It is an assembly, though an assembly of a specific character, having specific objects in view; all of which will come under consideration in the subsequent pages.

In the meantime, the reader is requested to observe the wisdom developed in the application of the term *ἐκκλησία* to such an assembly. It was in common use, we learn, among the Gentiles, who would constitute, for the most part, the Church of Christ. It very fitly distinguished Christians from the Jews, who called themselves the Synagogue; and, above all, it was congruous to the thing; since a Christian church consists of a num-

ber of individuals called out from the world by the Word and Spirit of God, and united together in voluntary combination, that, by a stated observance of Divine ordinances, they may secure their own edification, and advance the glory of their Master. The preceding definition renders it manifest that a formal, visible, and permanent union must have been established amongst a number of Christians before they can be regarded as a church. A church is compared to a body; but, as it is justly observed by the American platform of church discipline, "Hands, eyes, feet, and other members, must be united, or else, remaining separate, they are not a body." It is further compared to a house; but "stones, timber, though squared, hewn, and polished, are not a house until they are compacted and united; so saints or believers, in the judgment of charity, are not a church unless orderly knit together." This union, by which they are constituted a church, is effected by a real and express agreement amongst themselves to meet constantly together in one congregation, for the public worship of God and their own edification. They express this agreement by their constant practice in coming together for the public worship of God, and by their religious subjection unto the ordinances of God there.

SECTION II.

THE DESCRIPTION OF PERSONS OF WHOM A CHURCH OF CHRIST SHOULD CONSIST.

WE have seen that the spiritual fabric, denominated a Christian church, is not built up of unconscious, but of living materials: that it is an assembly of men and women. The next step in our progress is to exhibit their distinguishing character, since the materials must not merely possess life, but a specific kind of life, or the building cannot be a fit habitation of God through the Spirit.

A Christian church should consist of those, and those only, who make a credible profession of faith in Christ, and give satisfactory evidence of real conversion to God. There is no law in the New Testament touching the manner in which this profession should be made; and hence a diversity of practice in reference to this point, may exist, and does exist in congregational churches; some requiring from all applicants for church-fellowship an oral statement of their views of Divine truth, and their personal experience of its influence and power; others expecting only a written statement; while others, again, are satisfied with the report of conversations held on these subjects with the applicants by messengers deputed by the church. These may be allowed to be matters of minor importance; still it seems scarcely consistent with the general principles of Dissenters to exact, in all cases, conformity with a certain mode of admission to church-fellowship, which does not rest on the authority of the word of God. A church has only a

right to adopt satisfactory means of verifying the Christian profession and character of the applicant. With the confidence that he is a believer in Christ, its members can welcome him with joy and love. Without such confidence, they could not welcome him at all. It thus becomes a point of great importance, in the admission of members, to lay before the church as full an account as can be obtained of the religious principles, experience, and character of all who seek fellowship with the body.

The following arguments are sufficient, it is conceived, to support the great principle, that a Christian church should consist exclusively of believing and regenerated men and women.

First. The primitive churches appear to have admitted into their communion those, and only those, who gave satisfactory evidence of their faith in Christ. Thus, we are told, that on the day of Pentecost, there "were added to the church about three thousand souls;" but the whole of them had gladly received the words of Peter, Acts ii. 41. "All that believed," it is added, "continued daily in the temple, praising God, and having favour with all the people, and the Lord added to the church daily *such as should be saved*," or rather the saved, Acts. ii. 47. The apostles, on being delivered from confinement, "preached the word of God," we are told, with boldness; "and the multitude of *them that believed* were of one heart, and of one soul," &c., Acts iv. 32. After the death of Ananias and Sapphira fear came on all who heard the tidings, so that none but real converts to the faith of Christ durst join the band of the faithful; but "*believers*," it is said, "were the more added to the Lord," i. e. the church, "multitudes, both of men and women."

Further, the character of the persons who obtained admission into the primitive churches may be gathered, not merely from the history of the early propagation of Christianity, to which I have just alluded, but also from the manner in which those churches are addressed in the

various epistles written to them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The members of the church of Rome are, for instance, designated "the beloved of God, the called, the saints." Those who belonged to the Corinthian church are denominated "the sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called, the saints;" and the Apostle, wrote to them in common, he adds, "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours," 1 Cor. i. 2. In the commencement of his epistle to "the saints in Christ Jesus, which were at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons," we find the following words: "I thank my God, upon every remembrance of you; for your fellowship in the Gospel, from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," 1 Cor. i. 3—6: and the language he employs in his letter to the church at Ephesus is, in more parts of the epistle than one, such that I will venture to pronounce it totally at variance with the opinion that any individuals were either received into its communion, or retained in it, at least after their characters had become fully developed, whose conduct afforded decided evidence of the absence of real religion. Eph. i. 3—9, 12—15; ii. 1—7; iii. 14—21.

Against this reasoning it has been objected that there were unbelievers in the primitive churches; and I have no wish to deny that false brethren did occasionally creep in; nor, further, that the reins of discipline were held by some of those churches with too loose a hand. That however, in so far as it prevailed, was an evil. To infer that we may suffer discipline to become relaxed, because this may possibly have been the case with one or other of the primitive churches, is to maintain that we may do wrong in imitation of their bad example. They were commanded "to purge out the old leaven," "to put away from among them wicked persons," "to withdraw from every brother that walked disorderly;"

so that the retention of decidedly irreligious men by any of the primitive churches is, like the adultery of David, or the perfidy of Judas, a thing to be avoided, not imitated; a beacon to warn us against conduct which cannot fail to exert the most fatal influence upon the interests of pure and undefiled religion.

Secondly. None but decidedly religious men are morally capable of promoting the objects at which Christian fellowship aims, and which it was designed to secure. Every one feels that some measure of adaptation to advance the great purpose of any association, must be possessed by one who seeks to connect himself with it. A number of men combined together to advance the progress of natural science, for instance, would require, surely, in an applicant for admission to their body, some tincture of the philosophical spirit,—some progress in philosophical pursuits. Were he an ignorant rustic, what benefit could the body derive from his entrance in amongst them?—what advantage would result to him from his admission? Now I must not anticipate what will be better introduced elsewhere, by specifying the great objects which Christian fellowship aims to secure; but I beg the reader to remember that they are all spiritual in their nature; and require, accordingly, on the part of those who attempt to secure them, the possession of spiritual character. Not less absurd would it be to associate a ploughman with a company of politicians, or a mechanic with the faculty of physicians, than to admit a man, evidently destitute of the principles and spirit of religion, into a church of Christ. The members of the body could derive no benefit from his introduction; they would infallibly sustain injury—great injury. The little leaven would be in danger of leavening the whole lump. The Holy Spirit might be led to withdraw, and Ichabod become inscribed upon their sanctuary.

Thirdly. None but really religious persons can discharge the reciprocal duties which devolve upon the members of a church of Christ. Every relation we form

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lays especial duties upon us ; and, consequently, till we possess the power of fulfilling those which arise out of any contemplated relation, we ought not to enter upon it. Certain obligations and duties are inseparably connected with Christian fellowship. Unrenewed men are morally incapable of discharging them, because destitute of the principle from which alone their acceptable performance can flow. This principle is holy love, emanating from the heart of the Saviour, and circulating through all the members of his mystical body. Mutual watchfulness, forbearance, and forgiveness, &c., practised by the members of a Christian church, are, in fact, holy love carried out into vigorous and habitual action : nothing, indeed, is enjoined which is not a development of this high and sacred principle. Why, then, should an unconverted man seek fellowship with a church of Christ ? How can such a church open its doors to admit him ?

SECTION III.

THE PRINCIPLES WHICH ARE DEVELOPED IN AND LEAD TO THE FORMATION OF A CHURCH.

THE attention of the reader will be confined, on this part of the subject, to the two following points, viz : the *manner* in which that union among its members, by which they are constituted a church, is or ought to be effected ; and the causes which awaken the desire thus to unite and walk in Christian fellowship.

First. The manner in which the union of members in a church is effected. It will be sufficient to say, on this point, that it is formed by their own voluntary act. They come together by free and deliberate choice. They *give* themselves to one another according to the will of God, and are not *given* to each other by the state, or by any other power in existence. Must it not have been so in the first ages of Christianity ? The civil powers then in existence, inimical as they were to the new religion, would not, of course, force their subjects into the holy fraternity ; they persecuted and destroyed them, on the contrary, for entering it ; and the church had no power to compel them to come in : all who joined it must, therefore, have done it voluntarily ; and our history assures us that this was in fact the case. The three thousand converts, on the day of Pentecost, were added to the church by their own voluntary act ; for it is testified of them that “ they gladly received the words of Peter, and were baptized.” After the death of Ananias and Sapphira, fear prevented this voluntary act on the part of many ;—“ of the rest durst no man *join* himself

to them ;"—but not on the part of real converts, for "believers," we are told, "were the more added to the Lord," or to the church. The connexion, then, of any individual with a church of Christ is a voluntary connexion. He enters it voluntarily,—he remains in it voluntarily. No power can righteously oblige him (though such power has often been put forth) to do either the one or the other. We must not, however, be misunderstood here. We do not mean to affirm that a Christian is under *no* obligation to join the Christian body. We believe, on the contrary, that the command of his Lord to come out from amongst the men of the world, and to be separate, renders the act imperative upon him ; still his uniting himself with it is, on his part, a voluntary act, though commanded. The injunction to perform it does not deprive it of its voluntary character, or it would follow that, in every thing enjoined, a Christian is involuntary. And if that were the case, what room would there be for voluntary obedience ? i. e., what room would there be for obedience at all, since nothing that is not voluntary can be obedience. It is, however, to be especially remembered that, though bound by the authority of Christ to connect himself with his people, no person is bound in any other sense, or to any other being. The government cannot lawfully bind him. He is, and must be left perfectly free ;—responsible, indeed, to God, but to no one else. When, therefore, the strong arm of secular power, acting not on scriptural but on geographical principles, connects together a number of individuals who have no especial interest in one another,—erects them into parishes, and assigns a minister to each, (as in the establishment of this country,) there is a direct violation of the principle on which such societies should be formed. Their individual members do not come together according to the will of God, but are given to each other by the state ; and thus the whole system is unsound to the very core.

Secondly. The causes which induce this desire of uniting in Christian fellowship. These are, first, *love to*

Christ, whose glory is promoted by the withdrawal of his disciples from the avowed and visible enemies of their Lord. The whole world is the kingdom of Christ by right, but the church is his kingdom *de facto* as well as *de jure*. Its members are visibly subject to his authority; others visibly reject it. Hence the Apostle Paul gave thanks to God, on behalf of the Colossian believers, that he had delivered them from the power of darkness, and had translated them into the kingdom of his dear Son. Hence, also, he enjoined that the fornicator in the church at Corinth should be "delivered unto Satan," i. e., re-translated, by visible standing at least, into the kingdom of the god of this world, "for the destruction of the flesh." In our Lord's own directions, also, in regard to private offences, Matthew xviii. 17, we find it enjoined, that if the transgressor refuse to hear the church, he is to be to his former brethren as a heathen man, &c.; i. e., to be separated from their fellowship, and treated as one who manifestly belongs to a radically different community.

Now love to Christ cannot fail to prompt its possessor to connect himself visibly with his kingdom. Ardent affection is not to be satisfied with the existence of love merely; it seeks to display and prove it. Yet how can this be done by an individual who suffers himself to remain visibly among the body of his Lord's enemies? How can the Saviour's honour be advanced by a man who continues in the camp of his foes? While allowances are made for the influence of mistake, prejudice, and circumstances, it is impossible to believe that ardent love to Christ will be found, generally at least, to exist in those cases in which it does not lead an individual to connect himself visibly with the disciples.

Secondly. Love to one another, the certain result of love to Christ. The object we have now in view forbids enlargement upon the spring of this mutual affection. We have rather to prove that it exists amongst the disciples of Christ, and to show that it must prompt

them to seek mutual fellowship. "He that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." Recollecting these words, which contain a general statement, true in every separate case, we feel no surprise at the strong language of Christ, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one towards another;" since fraternal love is manifestly not an accidental or arbitrary criterion of discipleship: it is a necessary, and an infallible criterion. No man can love the disciples who does not love their Master: nor, on the other hand, can any one love *Him* who does not love *them*; for he himself loves them, and is gone to prepare mansions for them, that they may all dwell in his presence for ever. Now can it be conceived that mutual love will not lead to mutual fellowship? Though two cannot walk together unless they be agreed, will they not walk in union when they are thus agreed? Of old, they who feared the Lord spake often one to another; and, in the present day, those who love the Redeemer, and one another for his sake, will assuredly seek that intercourse on earth which is to be perpetuated and perfected in heaven.

Thirdly. Union in the faith of the distinguishing principles of the Gospel. Among the body of Christ, there is one faith as well as one baptism,—radical identity of belief, with partial and unimportant diversity. The truth of God, in relation to the deep degradation and ruin of man by sin,—his redemption by Jesus Christ,—his renewal by the Holy Ghost, is enthroned in the understanding and conscience of all the members of the body; and their hearts are bound to one another on that account. "The elder," writes the venerable Apostle John, "unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but all they that have known the truth; for the truth's sake which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever," 2 John 1, 2. Is it surprising, then, that they who love the truth, and each other for the truth's sake, influenced by a strong desire

of mutual fellowship, should come out from the world, and form a separate and peculiar people,—a holy brotherhood, having a community of opinions and experience,—of joys and sorrows,—hopes and fears, with which unrenewed men have no sympathy, and of which they have little conception?—On the contrary, it is just what we should have expected. Identity of sentiment and pursuit, especially when connected with fraternity of feeling, cannot fail, and do not fail, to produce intercourse and fellowship amongst all who are thus united. Their cementing influences are seen in the world,—in the walks of commerce,—in the paths of science and literature. How should they not be felt in the church?—or rather in *forming* the church?—in drawing its members together from the north, the south, the east, the west, and causing them, with a holy joy with which strangers intermeddle not, to sit down together in their Father's kingdom.

Finally. Common participation in the privileges, and hopes, and prospects of the Gospel. They are sons of God,—brethren *in* Christ; and, by his Infinite grace and condescension, brethren *of* Christ. They are pardoned, and justified, and sanctified. They have access by one Spirit unto the Father. They know not what they shall be, but they know that when He who is their life shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory. They feel that they are in a stranger land, but they are cheered with the thoughts of home, and exult in the anticipation of the moment when all the ransomed of the Lord shall, in the highest sense of the words, return to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Under the influence of these recollections and feelings, they give themselves to one another according to the will of God, that, by mutual fellowship, they may confirm each other in the faith, and, by combined exertions, may more effectually and rapidly extend the kingdom of their common Lord.

SECTION IV.

THE OBJECTS WHICH THE CHURCH AIMS TO ACCOMPLISH.

ONE general description, the description already given, characterises the whole of them ; they are entirely spiritual in their nature. I speak not now, of course, of the *actual* objects which certain individuals have sought to secure by joining the Christian body ; but those which they ought to have proposed to themselves. There have doubtless been instances in which worldly-minded men have desired and obtained fellowship with a church of Christ, and have even gone to the table of the Lord, (thus eating and drinking to themselves damnation,) to secure what they deemed important political privileges. Others have adopted the same unholy measures in the hope of escaping the reproach which, in certain circumstances, invariably overtakes (this is often the case in Scotland) an habitual neglecter, as well as an open contemner, of the ordinances of religion. Some, again, have followed in this course to advance their worldly interests. But all these men abuse the institution of Christian fellowship as he abuses wine who takes it to produce intoxication, and not, as we may lawfully do, to refresh and stimulate. The object of Christian fellowship is not political, not literary, not commercial. It has no direct bearing upon any thing worldly and temporal ; its immediate relation is to spiritual and eternal concerns.

The proximate object sought to be secured by Christian fellowship is, the personal edification, and comfort, and protection of its members. Superior means of spiritual

growth, and security, are enjoyed in connexion with an associated body of Christians, than can be possessed by one who stands in an isolated condition. A member of the spiritual community *has access to all the ordinances which are observed by the associated body*, powerfully calculated as they are to extend his knowledge, to strengthen his faith, to confirm his love, to increase his joy in the Holy Ghost, to cherish every devout and holy affection, and to render him fully meet to be a partaker "of the inheritance of the saints in light." He becomes *especially interested in the prayers of the church, obtains the inspection, the watchful and guardian care of the church*. If he be ignorant, the other members of the body will instruct him; if in danger, they will come forward to the rescue; if he droop, they will cheer him; if he waver, they will warn and stimulate him; if he sin, they will rebuke him, and when the righteous smite it is an excellent oil which does not break the head. Their affectionate and solemn admonitions will, there is strong ground to hope, recover him from the snare of the devil.

A person who desires fellowship with a Christian church seeks to obtain these eminent spiritual advantages. Two, he remembers, are better than one; and he enters the church below, that he may be more safely guided, and more efficiently sustained, in his way to the church above.

But his desire should also be to communicate as well as to receive. The Gospel breaks down the selfishness of the human heart; and, accordingly, every right-minded member of a Christian church, though in the early stages of his religious life he will probably regard, chiefly at least, his own profit, will, when he has reached the maturity of Christian experience and character, extend a helping hand to those behind him who are in a condition to need it. It is in consequence of this disposition to communicate, as well as to receive, that the more abundant spiritual wealth of one member becomes the com-

mon property of the church. The superior knowledge, or faith, or prudence, or courage of one, is thus rendered a benefit to all ; for, when a church is under wise direction, and a pastor perfectly understands his duty, and is competent to its discharge, almost every member will be made to work for the common benefit ; and their combined labours will be perfectly harmonious, will all tend to the same delightful result, will all be found necessary ; " so that the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee, nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you." Thus, there will be " no schism in the body," but the members " will have the same care one for another." It is in this way that Christian fellowship becomes so exalted a blessing. Let those despise it who may ; one thing is at least certain, that it can never be despised by those who are eminently holy, or who desire to become so.

The ultimate object of Christian fellowship is the promotion of the glory of the Triune God ; of the Father, who provided the Redeemer for fallen man ; of the Son, who became that Redeemer ; and of the Holy Spirit, who, by opening the heart to receive the testimony of God concerning his Son, brings us into the personal enjoyment of the blessings of his redemption. Christians are commanded to do all they do to the glory of God. It follows then, by necessary consequence, that the promotion of that glory must be the ultimate object of church-fellowship. In fact, it was to secure this very object that the individuals of which the church consists, were separated, as to spirit, by Divine grace, from the world. " Ye are a chosen generation," says Peter, " a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." 1 Peter ii. 9. Had not, then, the ordinance of Christian fellowship been adapted to promote the Divine glory, it would not have been instituted ; for God aims in every act, (as he ought to aim,) in every institution, to secure his own glory ; for his pleasure all

things were created. It is, however, most powerfully adapted to promote it.

God is glorified by that voluntary act which brings the members of the church of Christ together ; for it is an act of obedience to his commands, and to his commands exclusively. Their withdrawment from the world, their confederacy with each other, their existence as a religious body, are practical and visible demonstrations of subjection to Divine authority. Their separate and peculiar state does honour to the sovereign rule of God, as their peculiar character displays and glorifies his omnipotent power and grace.

God is glorified, further, by all those acts of worship which are rendered to him publicly in the church, and by the church, as well as by all the religious services in which its associated members engage. In the prayers of the church, God's all-sufficiency, his power to impart every "good thing," and his readiness to bestow it for the sake of Christ, are honoured. In the praises of the church, God's goodness and grace, in the actual communication of innumerable blessings, are acknowledged and honoured. In the reading of the Scriptures, and in the preaching of the word, God's rightful authority over the understanding, and conscience, and heart, is acknowledged and honoured for the tendency and aim of both is, to make the members of the body think as God thinks, and feel as God feels, and act as God acts. In the discipline of the church, presiding, as she does, at the door of entrance, to preserve it from the intrusion of false brethren, and watching over the conduct of all, to cast out such if any such should have gained admission, God's essential and infinite purity is acknowledged ; for nothing but a holy temple can be a fit habitation of God through the Spirit.

Now, as Christian fellowship thus tends to promote the Divine glory, all who seek admission to it should keep this object in view. While their own comfort and edification may be the proximate, this should be their

ultimate, and, I will add, their supreme object. Every thing ought to be subordinated to this : even progressive sanctification itself. Our aim in seeking eminent piety should be that we may more effectually promote the Divine glory. Far more clearly does it appear that God's glory, and not our *personal comfort*, should be the paramount object to be kept in view. It is to be feared that, in this respect, there is a defect in the views and aims of certain persons who stand in church-fellowship with us. They seek comfort, and they attend the religious services of the church to secure this desirable object. Seemingly, they do not much care whether the glory of God be promoted, provided they obtain comfort. Now if this be refined, it is nevertheless pure selfishness ; it is moreover useless selfishness ; for, generally speaking, these comfort seekers seldom find it. They adopt not the right method of obtaining it. If they would think more of the glory of God, and engage in public worship with a more simple and exclusive desire to promote that glory, they would be far happier than they now are, or deserve to be. "If you take care of the glory of God," said the late excellent Andrew Fuller, "he will take care of your comfort ;" and, it may be added, of your sanctification also.

The final object of Christian fellowship is the support, preservation, and diffusion of the truth, as it is in Jesus. That truth has been committed to the church ; its custody devolves upon its members generally, and they are responsible for the manner in which they discharge their trust. Hence the apostle Paul calls the church "the pillar and ground of the truth," its stay and support, designed to preserve it from sinking and being trodden under foot, as mere systems of human invention deserve to be. And the church has been found sufficient, in point of fact, to secure this object. The world has never had cause to bewail the total extinction of Divine truth. By the church has its blessed and holy light been sustained. She will continue to minister to its support and

diffusion ; her Master is with her to supply the sacred oil ; and his promise, " Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world," is a sufficient ground for our confidence, that the light of truth will continue to burn brighter and brighter, till all nations rejoice, and walk in the brightness thereof. Further remarks on this point will be made when we exhibit the duties which the church owes to the world. Regard to brevity prevents greater enlargement here.

Now, as the church has been constituted by God " the pillar and ground of the truth," every person in joining a church ought to have a conscientious regard to this object. He should think of himself as entering into an army designed to effect the moral subjugation of the world. He should remember that he pledges himself to bear his part in the conflict. He puts on the armour that he may wear the crown of victory. How can a Christian, then, keep aloof from Christian fellowship ? Refusing or neglecting to join the holy band, how can he share in the conqueror's reward ?

It ought to be observed, before we pass to the next subject of inquiry, that, from the foregoing statements of the design of Christian fellowship, it follows that a church of Christ is fitted in itself to exist under any form of civil government. Despotism, indeed, often bids it away from its domains ; but it would thrive under despotism, were it permitted to fix itself in the soil ; and, in point of fact, it grew more satisfactorily, and vigorously, under the ban than under the smiles of the Roman emperors. Still, a free government, and liberal institutions, more congruous as they are with itself, are greatly more favourable to its growth.

We would add, as a second remark, that it may without fear be permitted to exist under any liberal government, because it cannot possibly inflict injury upon that government. It is, indeed, a kingdom, but not of this world. Its aim is not to make men politicians, but to make them holy ; to sanctify and prepare them for

heaven ; and therefore Cæsar has nothing to fear from it. In its direct commands, and in its spirit and tendency, Christianity is decidedly friendly to all free governments. I dare not make the same assertion in regard to despotism ; for, though it enjoins us to be subject to the powers that be, not for wrath, but for conscience' sake, I am not prepared to deny, I do not wish to deny, that its general spirit and tendency are adverse to despotic power. I own I should not love it as I do if it were not so. It is the glory of Christianity that where it prevails despotism withers, as the deadly night-shade cannot live upon pure oxygen. It makes no direct assault upon the monster ; it would not soil its fingers by actual, though hostile, contact with it. But it silently, though securely works, and, impregnating the soil with an element on which despotism starves and dies, it thus obtains a bloodless and undefiling victory.

SECTION V.

THE DUTIES WHICH ARE INCUMBENT UPON THE MEMBERS OF A CHURCH.

ALL the relations which rational and accountable beings can sustain, either to God or to each other, connect with them peculiar obligations. There are certain feelings and actions which correspond with those relations, and which we are bound to possess and perform on that very account. New relations, accordingly, bring with them new duties, and bind us to their performance. He who enters into Christian fellowship invests himself with fresh relations, and he cannot contract the relations without assuming their responsibilities and obligations. The duties to which they oblige may be, and indeed too frequently are, partially neglected or forgotten ; but they cannot be annihilated. It is of inconceivable importance that these statements should be pressed upon the attention of all who seek, or at present enjoy, fellowship with us. Is there not, on this point, much of mistake and ignorance? Are there not persons who enter our churches, merely to gain access to the table of the Lord?—not considering, or not sufficiently considering, that, by the act of joining the body, they take upon themselves a class of additional duties which cannot be habitually neglected without incurring the risk of damnation. Are there not ministers who content themselves with preaching the Gospel, without enforcing with sufficient distinctness and earnestness, the special obligations of the associated body to their Lord, to each other, to the world at large? It is to be feared there are ; and it is

not wonderful that they meet with little or no success. How can the Master be expected to be present with a body which neglects to do all things whatsoever he has commanded them ?

I. There are special duties which the members of a church owe to Christ, the exalted King in Zion. "He is the head of his body, the church;" its exclusive head, to the utter subversion of the claim of any pretended vicegerent, or visible head, in heaven, or on earth. The church, then, owes to him,

First: A steady refusal, at whatever cost, to yield submission, *on strictly religious subjects*, to any authority but His; whether it be civil or ecclesiastical authority; whether it be that of pope or emperor, or cardinal or bishop; whether that of Presbyterian synods, or Methodist Conferences, or Congregational Unions, or churches or pastors, (for it will be afterwards seen that the authority of a Christian pastor is not distinct from that of Christ,) it has no moral right to coerce conscience, or to enforce obedience. Proceed from what source it may, if it attempt to do this, it should be firmly resisted as involving an infringement upon the privilege of the great Head of the church.

Secondly. The deepest reverence for His authority, manifested by implicit obedience to His commands. If others have not authority, his is supreme, for his right to rule is perfect. His qualifications for ruling are, in degree, infinite; and therefore his government is what it should be, pure spiritual despotism; the best and most perfect form of government when, as here, boundless wisdom, inviolable truth, inflexible justice, and infinite goodness, preside at the helm. The church owes unquestioning, universal obedience to Him; and its language should ever be, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

Thirdly. A diligent study of Divine revelation, for the purpose of obtaining a full and complete understanding of all its statements in reference to the constitution,

government, laws, &c., of the Christian church. The Scriptures, especially those of the New Testament, contain the statutes of our King. We are bound to examine these statutes; and, if the principle of subjection to him be enthroned in the heart, this will be done. All professions of regard to the Master's authority, are hypocritical and base, where the Master's voice is not listened to; where the Master's written directions are not studied with deep reverence and profound attention.

Finally. The church owes to its Head, incessant care to preserve His laws in a state of practical efficiency. While it is allowed that they exist in the statute-book, they may fall into practical abeyance. The execution of many of those laws will often require great self-denial, and firmness, and strength of determination to resist the influence of friendship and relationship, and a simplicity of aim to promote the honour of the Saviour, not to be expected, perhaps, in every member of the Christian body. And the inertia of the less enlightened and devoted, arresting the progress of the rest, the machine of Christian discipline is impeded in its march. The rod of discipline is permitted to rest in its slumbers; evil-doers are unreprieved; individuals, having entered the body, and finding no vigilant eye upon them, act as they choose, make their exit as they please, when and where they please, while no one is aware of their departure. Such churches are a disgrace to the name they assume; and, what is a subject of much deeper regret, they inflict dishonour upon the Saviour. His laws must be studied, they must be loved, they must be obeyed by every Christian community, or its members grossly violate the duties they owe to their exalted Head.

II. There are especial duties which the members of a Christian church owe to each other.

First. They owe to one another fervent brotherly love. Eph. v. 2; 1 John ii. 9—11, iii. 10—12; 1 Thess. iv. 9, 10. We have seen, indeed, that love is the sacred cement which binds the stones of this spiritual building

together : it is more than this ; it is the attractive principle by which they are brought together ; it is the cause of the union of believers in Christian fellowship ; it is also the effect of it. For there is a special love which grows out of the relation when formed, as well as a common love which led to its formation. While Christians are commanded to love all who love the Saviour, they are pre-eminently bound to love those who form constituent parts of the same Christian body with themselves. If it should be doubted whether they ought to love them with more intense affection than others, there can be no question that they are under a special obligation to let the fruits of their love abound towards them. It is no doubt true, that, when they have the power and the opportunity, they should scatter these fruits of love far beyond the boundaries of their respective enclosures : but it will be well to remember that none within these enclosures should be overlooked. The first objects of attention, and sympathy, and kindness, and prayer, are those within the enclosure ; the second, those who are without. And it is of importance to remember that, by a practical attention to these directions, the welfare of the whole body of believers is more effectually secured than if the love of each individual had had no particular direction given to it, and were allowed to expatiate indiscriminately. In the latter case, there could not be an equal division of the cares, and sympathies, and general fruits of love. An ocean might flow to one, and scarcely a rill to another. God has wisely ordered it otherwise. The members of each church are especially bound to love and watch over each other ; and thus the wants of the whole family of the faithful are more certainly supplied, and their welfare more certainly secured.

Secondly. They owe to one another mutual watchfulness. The pastor is to watch for the souls of his flock, but the duty is not confined to him, as there is reason to fear it is in too many cases imagined ; all the members are to watch over one another. " Looking diligently,"

says the apostle, "lest any man fail of the grace of God ; lest any root of bitterness, springing up, trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." Heb. xii. 15. The individuals who compose a Christian church, are a band of travellers passing through the lands of an alien, and an enemy. The utmost vigilance is of course required, to secure them against the dangers which encompass them. Should not each regard himself as in part, at least, his brother's keeper, and in some measure responsible for his brother's safety ? While the leader of the band frequently throws his eye over the entire company, to see that none fall into snares, none stray from the path, none lag behind ; should not this be done also by every member of the body ? Where holy love and eminent spirituality exist, it will be done. Each will be anxious that his brethren should hold fast the truth, should display its lovely spirit, and act under its direction. He will feel that the prosperity of others, adding as it does to the amount of holy influence which is to bear upon the world, and to promote his Master's glory, is a gain to him ; while their coldness and inactivity are a positive loss. He will, therefore, look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God : but his vigilance will be that of love ; it will not be watchfulness for the halting of a brother, but anxiety to prevent it ; not a prying and impertinent intrusion of himself where he has no right to enter, with the hope of detecting something amiss, (of all impertinences the most abominable,) but an unobtrusive observance of what falls under his notice ; that if there should be any departure, on the part of those with whom he mingles, from the spirit of the Gospel, a word of faithfulness and affection may prevent further aberration, and recover his brethren altogether from the snare of the destroyer.

Such watchfulness ought not to be offensive, cannot, indeed, be so to a spiritually-minded man. I am not, indeed, unaware that there are members of Christian

churches who would resent as an insult the gentlest word of expostulation, especially when it proceeded from an inferior; but these persons have not the spirit of Christ. The Gospel has failed to bring down their lofty looks, and to lay the native pride of their hearts in the dust. How do I bear reproof, or warning, is an excellent test of spiritual state. The Christian who desires to be preserved from sin, (and none are Christians who do not,) will bless the faithful word of caution which prevents, perhaps, his return to the world and his destruction with it.

Thirdly. They owe to one another great faithfulness of reproof when sin has been actually committed. The first effort is to keep from sin, the next to recover from it. "Thou shalt not," was the ancient command, "hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." Lev. xix. 17. "If thy brother," says our Lord, "trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone," &c., Matt. xviii. 15. The faithful administration of rebuke is, no doubt, a very self-denying duty. It is painful to flesh and blood. Numbers shrink from the discharge of it. It might subject them to misrepresentation and calumny; it might injure their business, or expose them to ill-will and hatred. Why should they encounter such inconvenience and injury? I answer, and the answer will be sufficient for a Christian, "Because your Master enjoins it—because Christian love demands it." Can you suffer sin upon your brother? Will you expose him to the danger of repeating his transgression, and searing his conscience, and confirming himself in impenitence, and ruining his body, and damning his soul, rather than suffer the momentary pain which the discharge of an unpleasant duty would cost you? Call not yourself a Christian if you can permit yourself to act thus; for your conduct indicates the vilest selfishness. It prefers a few moments, or it may be hours, of your own ease, to the eternal happiness of

your brother. Can we wonder that he who thus leaves him to perish is declared to be a hater and murderer of his brother; or at the peremptory injunction, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him?"

Rebuke, it should be added, must be administered with great wisdom and affection, as well as faithfulness. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Gal. vi. 1. The motive thus urged to enforce this specific mode of tendering rebuke must come home to the feelings of every Christian. How can a high and lofty tone—a tone which savours of infallibility and impeccability, which seems to say, I could not have offended as you have done—be congruous with the circumstances and character of one who is compassed about with the same infirmity, and may fall as deplorably as the transgressor himself?

Besides, nothing but a mingling of affection with faithfulness will accomplish the object of rebuke. Sin hardens the heart, and mere rebuke will not soften it; but love breaks it at once, and, consequently, there issues from it the full stream of penitence, recovering for the offender the confidence of his brother and the favour of his Lord. It is of vast importance to invite penitence, and to render it, so to speak, easy, by manifesting a placable temper. In the presence of meekness and gentleness, a proud heart will often humble itself, while the habitually lowly spirit has been sometimes known to gather itself up into sullenness and impenitence, when treated with severity.

Fourthly. They owe to one another prompt and full forgiveness of trespasses and injuries, on satisfactory evidence of repentance. Observe the language of our Lord; "For, if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But, if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father

forgive your trespasses." Matt. vi. 14, 15. Listen, also, to his address to the servant who exercised not the forgiveness he had received; "Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou, also, have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had compassion on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." Matt. xviii. 33—35. "Be ye kind," said Paul, "one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Eph. iv. 32. "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Col. iii. 12, 13. Think, Christian brethren, of the thrilling motive by which the duty is enforced; God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us—forgiven us trespasses far more numerous and aggravated than any we can ever be called upon to pardon—trespasses, which went not merely to the injury of an individual, or a family, or even a nation, or a system, but to the overthrow of the moral order of the universe. Yet Christ has forgiven them; and our Father who is in heaven has forgiven them—forgiven them freely, fully, finally. He retains no remembrance of them. Isaiah xliii. 25. He has blotted them out as a cloud, of which no trace whatever remains. He has cast them into the depths of the sea. I need say no more, surely, than that men of implacability cannot be the sons of such a Father.

It was stated, that forgiveness should be invariably extended when there exists satisfactory evidence of repentance. Without such evidence it cannot be exercised, because, in true Christian forgiveness there is included not merely refraining from punishment, or re-

taliation, or subsequent allusion in conversation to the offence, (it does not say, with the world, I shall *forgive* and say no more about it, but I shall not *forget*,) but the restoration of the offender to the place he had formerly occupied in our esteem and regard. In short, we do not forgive until to us the offence is as if it had never been. If God remembers not our sins, surely the trespasses of our brethren, when followed by repentance, should be forgotten as well as forgiven.

No rule can be laid down by which to measure the degree of penitence which should be held to be satisfactory. This will depend upon circumstances, too varied and too minute to be specified; and further, upon the state of mind, the degree of placability, and of spiritual attainment, in the case of the offended party. The latter is thrown upon the influence of the great principle from which forgiveness should flow, and his conduct becomes, of course, a more sure and accurate index of the energy of its operation upon him. He who has an humbling sense of the enormity of the transgressions which have been forgiven to him, and fervent admiration of the grace which prompted to that forgiveness, will be prone to the exercise of this grace. He will not be exacting and excessive in his demands of penitence and confession, insisting, as some do, upon the full pound of flesh. He will welcome and encourage the appearance of contrition; and be far more careful to avoid requiring too much, than being satisfied with too little.

Finally. Forgiveness should, on satisfactory evidence of repentance, be prompt and cheerful, as well as complete. There may occasionally be observed a kind of reluctant surrender of displeasure when the trespass has been frankly acknowledged; pardon appears rather to be extorted than bestowed; it does not gush, but it is forced from the spring out of which it should spontaneously flow. Now, in every case of this kind, it loses all the grace, and loveliness, and moral efficiency of pardon. It is the obvious existence of placability in the offended

party, his manifest readiness to throw away his displeasure, and to meet the offender, with all his former confidence and affection, as soon as the justice of the case will possibly admit—which cannot appear without prompt forgiveness—that arms it with power to reach and melt the heart, and augment the flood of penitence that had already begun to flow. The father, in the Gospel, did not wait the arrival of his prodigal, but repentant and returning son; “but when he was yet a great way off, he saw him and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” Luke xv. 20. To every member of our churches, the example of our Father in heaven says, “Go, and do thou likewise.”

Fifthly. They owe to one another Christian forbearance. “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. With all lowliness, and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.” Eph. iv. 2; vide also Col. iii. 13. And again, Romans xiv., and xv. 1. Amongst those who are united with us in church-fellowship, (or who desire to join us,) there may be individuals whose knowledge of Divine truth is very imperfect, whose faith is weak, who display certain constitutional failings, certain infirmities of temper, &c., which are to us the sources of great annoyance, if not of positive spiritual injury. The question is, are we to relinquish and to refuse all visible Christian fellowship with them? The inspired rule answers the question in the negative, provided we can and do regard them as real Christians. There does not appear to exist any scriptural ground of exclusion from Christian fellowship, but some error in sentiment, or ungodliness of spirit or conduct, which bespeaks the absence of real religion. Christian churches are the habitations of the Lord’s people; and who shall repel any whom the Lord has received? My limits will not allow me fully to illustrate the great subject of forbearance, which, considered in relation to diversities of opinion on religious subjects, frailties of temper,

constitutional defects, &c., would require a volume, rather than a page or two, the utmost space that I can allot to it. But I cannot forbear expressing the opinion, that if we refuse to act on this point, under the guidance of the great general principle, that converted men, willing to walk with us, and to submit to the discipline of the Church, though not free from mistakes, and prejudice, and infirmity, are eligible for church fellowship, we shall find no other rule of direction than that of perfect identity of sentiment, and feeling, and practice; and then, as such identity cannot be found, every Christian must be shut up in a watch-box by himself. Many diversities of opinion there are, some frailties of temper, and some constitutional defects, which are not totally incompatible with real religion; and with these Christians and Christian churches must forbear. They must not, of course, either admit falsehood to be truth, or prejudice candour, or that petulance, irascibility, pertinacity, are Christian virtues, or treat them as such; nor, further, must they neglect to lift up their testimony against error, and to reprove the failings to which I have referred. The practice of passing them over as mere constitutional defects confirms the offenders in their evil practices, and inflicts great injury upon the Church; but, as long as they retain their confidence in the personal religion of such individuals, they should allow them to remain in fellowship. I mean, further, that they should endeavour, as much as possible, to avert their eyes from these failings—should not suffer them to dwell in their recollections, lest the sacred bond of affection be weakened or snapped asunder; for when charity ceases to exist in a church, it has become “like sounding brass, or tinkling cymbal.”

Finally. They owe to one another a cordiality of bearing, and of general conduct, indicative of a sense of the spiritual relation which exists between them.

Let it not be forgotten, that the connexion into which

the members of Christian churches have been brought by the faith of the Gospel, is one which will exist throughout eternity. Spiritual relations endure for ever; all others terminate with time. Distinctions which result from rank, and station, and wealth, are but the distinctions of a day; soon will they perish, and be for ever forgotten. Even the tenderest of those ties which bind the human family together will speedily be broken, and the husband and the wife, the parent and the child, the brother and the sister, remain the subjects of those delightful relations no longer. But the members of a Christian church, if indeed they are what they profess to be, are brethren and sisters for eternity! Can it, then, be right that they should even meet without any sign of recognition? Is it congruous with the sacred and enduring relation which the Gospel has established amongst them, that the more respectable and wealthy of their number should sit, on the Sabbath, in immediate contact with a brother, it may be of low degree, but with whom they expect to join in eternal acts of worship to God and the Lamb, and yet refrain from any friendly salutation, lest they should forfeit their dignity? Ought we not to be suspicious of such dignity? I confess I would infinitely rather peril mine than run the risk of being ashamed of Jesus, even in the least of his disciples. While it would be a great mistake to seek to destroy, or practically to overlook, those worldly distinctions which answer important purposes in the present life, it is a yet more preposterous anomaly to withhold from the relations which reach into eternity, all visible and friendly signs of recognition. My observations and experience compel me to think that the latter practice proves, in the case of our churches, the source of extensive injury. It prevents the amalgamation of the body. It obstructs the flow of sympathy through the body. It holds a part of its members in distant inactive solitariness, lest they should lose their dignity. It represses activity, in the case of another part, lest they should be presuming, and

offend ; and thus, while the frank manifestation and the full flow of brotherly kindness would have imparted life, and energy, and activity, to the entire community, the opposite feeling and practice have brought upon it stagnation and spiritual death.

"The poor," said our Lord, "ye have always with you;" and the sick, it may be added, generally so. Christian sympathy and Christian aid, the pitying heart and the helping hand, surely befit the relation which binds the members of a Christian church together. "Pure religion and undefiled, before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction," &c. James i. 27. "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?" ii. 15, 16. "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you," said our Lord, "he shall not lose his reward," Matt. x. 42; what tenderness of affection to the disciples do these words display!—and "if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." How powerfully, again, does the language of the Judge, in the account of the proceedings of the last day, display his love to his people; and how strikingly does it prove that all the churches must abound in the work of faith and labour of love, to the poor and sick of their number, so tenderly beloved by him, to secure his approbation; "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me:"—"Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me?" Matt. xxv. 40, 45. It is worthy of inquiry, whether it be consistent with love to Christ, to permit one of his disciples to die in the poor-house, or to receive parish relief?

III. There are duties which the members of a Christian church owe to the world.

The amount of those duties may be comprised in the following statement. They owe to the world wise, persevering, and unwearied efforts to promote its salvation. They must not be satisfied with seeking edification from their pastors, nor with adopting means to edify one another. It is to be feared that this important sentiment has not always been remembered. Certain churches, chiefly those that approach towards Sandemanian principles, have aimed to secure, by church-fellowship, nothing more than their own spiritual improvement. The ungodly, either at a distance, or in the vicinity, might die and be finally lost, for any practical care of theirs; while they have regarded themselves, at the same time, as branches of that church to whose custody the Gospel was committed, that by its members it might be diffused throughout the world. But how can we admit their claim to be churches of Christ? How can the spirit of the Gospel exist, where desire and effort for its extension exist not? I cannot think that the members of such churches have a legitimate aim. They may seek intellectual improvement—a more correct and critical acquaintance with the meaning of certain parts of Divine revelation—but not real spiritual edification, which consists mainly in progressive conformity to the Divine image, and devotion to the Divine glory. The church is the *pillar and ground of the truth*. It has to preserve it in existence. The church is *the appointed instrument for diffusing the truth*. It first absorbs, for its own benefit, the light and heat which proceed from the Sun of Righteousness; and then it radiates them back again upon a dark and frozen world, that its dreary and desert wastes may be transformed into fields of vernal freshness, may in due season pour forth abundantly their rich autumnal fruit, and become full of the abodes of pleasantness and peace. The Church preserves and diffuses the truth, which, be it remembered, is the appointed instrument for the salvation of the world.

First. By holding up to the world the light of a holy

and consistent example. The church is compared to a city ; the injunction is, to set it upon a hill ; it is a candle, which is not to be put under a bushel, but on a candlestick, so that it may give light to all that are in the house. The light, then, of the church's example must be a holy and consistent light, or it will not promote the glory of God. "Let your light," therefore, said our Lord, "so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matt. v. 16. Such a light was held up to the inhabitants of Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, by the churches in those regions, who "walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost ;" and the historian adds, "they were multiplied." Many were turned to the Lord and added to the Church ; for this light, we may perhaps venture to add, is never exhibited totally in vain. It tends to secure the efficiency of the ministry of the word ; and that ministry is indeed seldom successful without it. Hence, even the apostle Paul, writing to the Philippians, exhorts them to "hold forth the word of life," "that I may rejoice," he adds, "in the day of the Lord, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." Phil. ii. 16. By thus exhibiting the light of a holy example, the private members of our churches, together with their ministers, may strive "together for the faith of the Gospel."

Secondly. By employing effectual measures to secure amongst them an efficient administration of Divine ordinances. The stated worship of a Christian church, the public prayers which are presented to God, the praises which are offered, the administration of discipline, the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and preeminently the preaching of the Gospel, are all adapted to promote the salvation of the world. They are all designed, not merely to edify the church, but to enlarge its boundaries, by bringing in them that are without. The church is, accordingly, bound to provide every thing essential to the existence and action of all this moral machinery ; to

look out for men to take the oversight of them in the Lord, who are thoroughly qualified for the discharge of every part of pastoral duty; men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, apt to teach, able to rule well the church of God. It is bound to see that there be no departure from the faith in the pulpit, for such departures have frequently, not to say generally, originated there. The proclamation of the truth is, as we have seen, a part of the instrumentality employed by the church to promote the salvation of the world; its members ought, consequently, to be especially concerned that it be adapted to secure this important end. They are bound to see that no part of the pastoral work be neglected, or negligently performed: for the church at Colosse were instructed to say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it." Col. iv. 17. They are further bound to provide for the supply of the pastor's temporal necessities; and the provision is to be made *not grudgingly*, but with a willing mind. It is to be made *affectionately and generously*; not as a gratuity, disgraceful to the one party, and insulting to the other; but as the discharge of a debt, or rather an acknowledgment of obligations, which never can be fully discharged. "Let him," says Paul, "that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth *in all good things*." Gal. vi. 6; and again, "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so, hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." 1 Cor. ix. 11—14. It should be remembered, that this obligation to support the pastor, to support him efficiently, so that he may be without carefulness, without need of seeking supplies from other sources, rests upon the same ground with the duty of supporting the pastoral office itself. It is not so much on account

of the pastor, personally considered—merely for his accommodation and comfort—though these points can never be overlooked by a pious and affectionate people; but the church is bound thus to support him, that he may be able to discharge efficiently the duties of his office, by giving his whole time, and the undivided and unbroken energy of his mind, to his ministry; neither of which can be done, if he be left in want, or obliged to pursue some other employ. “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” 2 Tim. ii. 4. Let it never be forgotten that, as the ministry of the pastor is the instrumentality which the church employs, and is bound to employ, to secure the salvation of the world, its members lie under the same kind of obligation to keep him free from care, and secular employment, as to see that he does not depart from the faith and purity of the Gospel.

Finally. On this point, let it be observed, that the church is bound to secure a suitable building, in which the main, or, at any rate, the more public efforts of the pastor to promote the salvation of the world may be put forth. It is not, by this statement, meant merely that the obligation under which the members of the church lie to seek their own edification should lead them to provide a building for the purposes of public worship; nor, further, that that building should not be inconvenient and uncomfortable; though it may be well for those whose private abodes are spacious, and even elegant, to ask, where is consistency and conscience, if they allow the house of God to lie in dust and dilapidation? But we take higher ground even than this. We mean that the duty they lie under to the world will not allow of their neglecting to do this. The Church is to extend, as we have seen, the knowledge of the truth, and thus promote the salvation of the world, by securing an efficient administration of the regular ordinances of Divine worship. The preaching of the Gospel is preeminently adapted to secure this end.

But if its members refuse to provide a place in which the ungodly in their vicinity may hear the Gospel of salvation, or one which does not admit of their attendance, how can they discharge their duty towards them? The same general principles lead to the conclusion, that, without aiming at splendour in our places of worship, (which may be desired under the influence of the very worst feelings,) they should, if possible, be not barely comfortable, but in some measure attractive, that they may invite the attendance of those whose spiritual benefit ought to be especially contemplated in their erection.

Thirdly. By aggressive as well as by attractive measures; i. e., the Church must not only hold up the light of a holy example, and provide for an efficient administration of Divine ordinances, but it must employ every possible effort to diffuse the light of truth throughout the immediate vicinity, yea, to send it to the ends of the earth. It should go, by its emissaries, into the highways and hedges, and compel men to come in, that the supper may be crowded with guests. Some plan of general operation should be devised, and carried into effect, under the guidance of the pastor, as the result of which the Gospel may be made known throughout the entire neighbourhood, so that its inhabitants may, at least, have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the way of salvation. Failure, as it regards the success of these efforts, will doubtless pain, but it ought not to dispirit. Despair is always a bad counsellor: if the seed scattered by the sower does not spring up and bring forth fruit in this place, it may in that; if not at one time, it may at another. The voice says, "Be not weary in well doing, for in due time ye shall reap, if ye faint not." Gal. vi. 9.

But the immediate vicinity should not bound the exertions of a Christian church; and where the active, enterprising, ardent, benevolent spirit of eminent personal religion exists, it cannot be restrained within such paltry

limits. Overleaping the enclosure, it expatiates at large; it aims to stimulate and strengthen the associated churches of the county in which it is located, and to aid them in their attempts to evangelize the whole of the district. It surveys the entire length and breadth of the nation; entering with zeal into all those measures which are adapted to increase the number of the churches of the saints, and to provide for them a constant succession of pastors. Nor can the most distant boundary of the country limit its benevolence and its labours. The heart of Christianity is warm and expanded; its arms are far reaching, comprehending the world in their grasp. No church of the living God can, therefore, be satisfied till "the whole earth is full of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas."

It is the province of the church to evangelize the world: but as that work is far too mighty for the effort of any individual church, there should be a combination of churches for this purpose. Our missionary societies are not exactly combinations of churches; and, perhaps, on this account, their constitution and modes of procedure are not so perfect as it might be possible to render them: but, in spirit, the difference is so inconsiderable, that no Christian church, except one in name only, can hold back its support. It will aid by its exertions, its prayers, its pecuniary contributions.

SECTION VI.

THE OFFICERS OF A CHURCH.

THESE have been generally, and very properly, distinguished into ordinary and extraordinary. The extraordinary officers, comprehending prophets, apostles, evangelists, &c., were obviously appointed by the Redeemer to meet the emergency of the case. Christianity was then a new religion. No one, in the first instance, could in the slightest degree unfold its essential principles, its system of faith and practice, without a special revelation from God. And, even after the apostles had commenced their appropriate work of explaining and confirming the new religion, some time must necessarily elapse before any of those who received it could become qualified, by the use of ordinary means, to act as instructors of others. The Lord, therefore, graciously poured down upon the church a plentiful effusion of spiritual gifts. He qualified, by supernatural means, many men, besides the apostles, (whose specific work it was to plant the Gospel in the world by the power of that miraculous evidence which they were enabled to produce,) to act as pastors and teachers to the newly formed churches, until some of their members becoming, by ordinary means, fully instructed in the Gospel, should be able to edify their brethren, "to propagate their faith in the world, and to transmit it to posterity." When this should have become the case, all supernatural gifts were to cease. Now, as Jehovah invariably effects by natural means what is within their

reach and competency, never employing others unless his purposes cannot be effected without them, we might have assumed, without information, both that, in the infancy of the church, it would share richly in miraculous endowments, and that, when it should reach a state of comparative maturity, these endowments would be withdrawn. We are not left, however, without information. The Apostle Paul distinctly declares the purpose for which they were bestowed, and in what state of the church they were to cease. "But unto every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ; for he saith, He ascended on high, he took captivity captive, he gave gifts to men. And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some pastors and teachers," (i. e., extraordinary pastors and teachers, fitted for the work by miracle,) "FOR (the sake of) FITTING THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY, for (in order to) the building of the body of Christ, TILL WE ALL COME TO THE UNITY OF THE FAITH, AND OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SON OF GOD, TO A PERFECT MAN, EVEN TO THE MEASURE OF THE STATURE OF THE FULNESS OF CHRIST." Eph. iv. 7, 16.

The preceding account alone would require us to decide concerning the pretensions of certain men, in the present day, to be the successors of the apostles,—that they are both arrogant and baseless. It may, however, be stated, in addition, that the following qualifications were essential to an apostle. He must have seen Christ after his resurrection, for the apostles were ordained to be witnesses of the resurrection. Hence Paul, in proof of his apostleship, says, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, ix. 1, "Have I not seen (referring to his journey to Damascus) the Lord?" *It was again necessary that he should have the power of working miracles*; for that power was the exclusive prove of his Divine mission. "Truly," said Paul to the Corinthians, 2nd Epistle, xii. 12, "the signs of an apostle were wrought among you," "in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." There

can, accordingly, be no successors of the apostles at the present day. There are none who have seen the Lord—none who are endowed with supernatural gifts. The high pretensions of certain semi-papists to have received from the apostles, by an unbroken series of communication, authority to rule in the church of God, exclusively to ordain others to the Christian ministry, and to invest them with official power to communicate grace to their hearers, while they are themselves destitute of the divinely-required qualifications for the pastorate, and are, it may be, in a state of condemnation, might, perhaps, have obtained credence in the dark ages; certainly no Protestant understanding will admit them. We distinctly and most emphatically deny that any collection of bishops, even though the whole race were congregated together, could confer validity upon the ordination of a man who is not (as the apostle says he must be) apt to teach,—who is not sober, of good behaviour,—who has not a good report of them who are without, &c. And we maintain, on the other hand, that—when the required qualifications (*vide* epistles to Timothy and Titus,) of “a good minister of Jesus Christ” centre in a certain individual, and he has been invited by a Christian church to take the oversight of them in the Lord, and has further been solemnly set apart to the pastorate by fasting and prayer, and by the imposition of the hands of the presbytery—he has the most perfect right to officiate, though no mitred hands have been laid upon his head. We maintain this, because, though we have repeatedly and carefully examined the inspired directory, we cannot find that what is usually meant by Episcopal ordination, is a divinely-required qualification for a Christian pastor.

When the church, by the ministrations of the gifted men, had reached the requisite degree of maturity, or, in the language of the apostle, had attained to the “measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” it was left (because then it might be safely left) to the care of

ordinary office-bearers ; i. e., those who became qualified for the work by God's blessing upon ordinary means, and who were to remain to the end of the world. These consist of two classes.

THE FIRST CLASS CONTAINS THOSE THAT HAVE THE CHARGE OF THE SPIRITUAL CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH. Different names, such as pastors, teachers, elders, bishops, &c., are applied to them in the New Testament ; and a question has accordingly arisen, whether these names denote different orders of office-bearers in the same class, or different branches of the duty of the same office-bearer, i. e., the bishop or pastor. Congregationalists, for the most part, adopt the latter opinion ; Episcopalians and Presbyterians, the former.

Episcopalians contend for the existence of three distinct orders of spiritual office-bearers, viz. — bishops, priests or presbyters, and deacons. The system, as it exists in this country, does not seem to admit of any order of officers whose especial duty it is to provide for the wants of the poor. Probably, having shifted the burden of supporting the poor from its own shoulders to those of the nation at large, it sees no longer need for the election of secular deacons. In the Established Church of England, the deacon is a spiritual officer, having authority to preach the word, but not to administer sacraments. The priest, or presbyter, has a right to do both ; having derived it, not from the election of the Christian people among whom he is placed, but from the bishop of the diocese, in whom, and not in the presbyters, all right to rule is supposed to be vested ; and to whom paramount ecclesiastical power, within certain geographical boundaries, has been given, not by Jesus Christ, but by the civil government. The bishop may preach, but it is not a part of his office : his duty is to rule ; yet, though the law of the apostle appropriates the "double honour,"—the higher salary—to those elders who "labour in the word and doctrine," the bishop, who is not a labourer, in the sense

of the apostle, gets the lion's share; while, in some cases, the working clergy scarcely receive what is adequate to their support.

The precise nature of the deacon's office we shall endeavour hereafter to explain. The only point to which it is necessary now to advert, is, the effort of Episcopalians to prove that there exists a radical difference between the office of the bishop, and that of the presbyter;—the former being elevated in rank and authority over the latter, and having all ecclesiastical power intrusted to his hands. On the two following grounds we consider this an unscriptural distinction:—

First. The terms, bishops, and presbyters, or priests, are used convertibly in the New Testament. In Paul's epistle to Titus, we find the following words: "For this cause I left thee in Crete,"—"that thou shouldst ordain *elders* (presbyters, or *priests*, as the endowed church calls them,) in every city. If any be blameless," &c.—"For a *bishop* must be blameless," &c. Titus i. 5—7. Now, how could the apostle have urged, as a reason for electing a blameless elder, that a *bishop* must be blameless, if the office of the two were different? Again, we read, Acts xx. 17, that Paul sent from Miletus to Ephesus, and called the elders,—presbyters of the church—whom, on their arrival, he thus addressed: "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers," literally, bishops. What can be clearer, then, than that elders and bishops are convertible terms?

Peter also writes in the following manner:—"The elders who are among you, I exhort,"—"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof," &c., i. e., exercising the office of a bishop. 1 Peter v. 1, 2. The elders must, then, have held the office of a bishop, or they could not have been called upon to discharge its duties.

In the second place, the Apostle Paul, when enumerating the officers of a church, and describing their qualifi-

cations, mentions only bishops and deacons. It is not to be conceived that he would have taken no notice of a third, had there existed a third. The rational conclusion surely is, that bishops, i. e., pastors and deacons, are the only standing officers of the church.

Presbyterians deny, with Congregationalists, that bishops constitute a class of spiritual officers possessed of higher rank and authority than ordinary pastors or elders; but they break down the class of elders into two separate orders, viz., preaching and ruling elders; the former being clergymen, the latter laymen: and thus they virtually contend—those at least who elect deacons—for the existence of three classes of office-bearers in the Christian church. We deem the fact that two officers only are described by the apostle, to be as directly opposed to the Presbyterian as the Episcopalian hypothesis.

The notion, however, that ruling elders constitute a distinct class of officers, having right or power to aid the bishop or pastor in ruling, though not in teaching the church, must be a little further examined. Dr. Dick, the latest and most respectable advocate of this scheme, has adduced the following passages in support of it: first, Romans xii. 6—8, "Having, then, gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity," or without partiality, &c. "Here," adds Dr. Dick, "ruling is distinguished from teaching, exhorting, and giving; i. e., from the peculiar work of the pastor, the doctor, and the deacon.

Secondly: 1 Cor. xii. 28, "And God hath set some in the church, first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, governments, &c." "Helps," we are told, are deacons; "governments," governors. These

governors, being distinguished from prophets, apostles, and teachers, must be ruling elders.

Thirdly : 1 Tim. v. 17. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." In common with Presbyterians in general, Dr. Dick relies upon this passage as conclusive proof that the class of elders is broken down into the two divisions to which we have already adverted, viz., preaching and ruling elders.

On these arguments, I would call the reader's attention to the following remarks :—

First. That the reasoning is inconclusive, proving, as it most assuredly does, too much ; for if ruling, in Romans xii. 6—8, is so distinguished from the peculiar work of the pastor, as that the ruler is not a pastor,—the argument of Dr. Dick,—then it follows that the pastor is not a ruler. Again : if governments are an order of office-bearers distinct from pastors, then pastors are not governors ; but Presbyterianism makes the pastor a ruler or governor.

The language of Paul, again, 1 Tim. v. 17, mainly relied upon by Presbyterians, fails to prove that there should exist, in every church, a class of ruling, distinct from preaching, elders ; for his words necessarily imply that they who ruled, and they who laboured in the word and doctrine, sustained the same office, (though they might habitually discharge different branches of the office,) and do not permit us to suppose, with the Presbyterians, that the former were laymen merely, and the latter clergymen. The mistake of our opponents results from referring the word "especially," not to the whole of the previous phrase, but to the term "elders" exclusively. They interpret the passage as if its true reading were, "Let the '*elders*' be counted worthy of double honour, especially they *that labour*," &c. Now, if such had been the reading, it might have been concluded that "*elders*" is here a general term, comprehending both lay and

clerical elders. Such is not, however, the reading. The apostle says, "*Let the elders that rule well*, be counted, &c. &c., especially *they* that," &c. The word 'especially' refers to the whole of the preceding clause, and, consequently, the elders that labour in the word and doctrine must be understood as included in the class of good ruling elders; while presbyterianism takes them from it, and makes them clergymen. Let the reader examine the following illustrations:—Suppose the command were addressed to a church, "*Let those men who have grown old be supported by the church, and especially those who have laboured in its service;*" would the word 'especially' be understood as referring to *men* merely, or to the whole clause, "*men that have grown old?*" and would any one regard the whole as an injunction to support all who had laboured for the church's benefit? Surely not. The obvious command is, to support the *old* who have laboured. Add to this the following illustration from Scripture, occurring in the eighth verse of the same chapter: "*But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house,*" &c. &c. Here those of *his own house* are manifestly included in *his own*. How can it, then, be doubted that the elders *who labour in the word and doctrine* are comprehended in, or form a part, of the same class with those elders *that rule well?* i. e., in other words, that preaching and lay elders are not different classes of officers, (as presbyterianism contends,) the two clauses of the verse merely pointing to different departments and duties of the same office.

Secondly. If the mention of ruling as well as teaching proves that ruling and teaching are distinct offices,—the argument of Dr. Dick,—then it follows that the mention of teaching and exhorting would prove that they also are distinct,—which no one believes.

Thirdly. The supposition of the division of labour among the pastors, to which reference has been made, each addicting himself to that particular branch of the pastoral office for which his talents most eminently fitted

him, sufficiently accounts for the language of the apostle. Some pastors (I take it for granted there were, generally at least, in each church, more pastors than one, for which especial reasons existed in the infancy of the religion,) were preeminently adapted to guide the deliberations and decisions of the church, but not so eminently fitted for preaching the word: these are the elders who ruled well. Other pastors there were, whose versatility and plenitude of gifts preeminently qualified them for both departments of the pastoral office: these are they who both ruled well, and laboured in the word and doctrine, and who were to be accounted worthy of double honour.

Fourthly. It is manifest from the epistles to Timothy, and Titus, and from that to the Philippians, that bishops and deacons are the only standing office-bearers of the church. Dr. Dick's argument against the Episcopalians may be turned with irresistible force against himself: "In Timothy the apostle makes no mention of presbyters, but only of bishops and deacons." Presbyters are not, therefore, he concludes, distinct from bishops. We reply, he makes no mention of ruling elders, but only of bishops and deacons. Ruling elders and bishops are not, then, distinct.

The conclusion to which the previous discussion has conducted us is, that the class of officers appointed to conduct the spiritual affairs of the church, does not consist of different orders; that the terms, bishop, elder, pastor, teacher, &c., do not denote distinct offices, or gradations of rank in one general office, but different branches of the duty of the same office.

It may be expedient, before proceeding to describe the deacon's office, to refer to the mode in which bishops or pastors become invested with office; and the nature and extent of the authority with which it endows them.

I. The process of investiture with office. Here there are two steps: First, their election to the office; and, secondly, their ordination, or orderly and solemn induc-

tion into it, by fasting and prayer, and "the laying on of the hands of the presbytery."

The first step in the process by which the bishop or pastor becomes invested with office, is his election to that office by the suffrages of the members of the church over which he is called to preside. I have not joined the congregation with the church, as possessing in common with them the right of election, for more reasons than one. In the first place, because the new relation into which ordination brings the minister, is a relation specifically between him and the body of Christian communicants. He is the pastor of the church; others may acknowledge him as their minister; but he is not, properly speaking, their pastor. Secondly, because the New Testament does not recognise such a body as that to which we now give the name of congregation, to distinguish it from the church. In fact, the distinction did not, in primitive times, exist. The church was then the congregation; the congregation was the church. Though a few stragglers might occasionally mingle with the Christian assembly, to hear what the babblers had to say, all who remained as permanent attendants joined the body; and thus it should be now. Every Christian member of a congregation ought to be a member of the church. If he refuse or neglect to join it, he has surely no reason to complain that, in not being called upon to give his suffrage in the election of a pastor, he is made to suffer the consequences of the unscriptural position in which he chooses to remain. The peculiar privileges of a body ought not even to be coveted by those who, it may be, disdain to ally themselves with that body. Thirdly, because it would be dangerous to the interests of evangelical truth to extend generally the right of election beyond the boundaries of the church. The choice of ministers can never be confided with safety to irreligious men, though they may form a part of a Christian congregation.

I have spoken openly and strongly on this subject;

because practical attention to the principles just stated will be found greatly conducive to the spiritual welfare of our body. At the same time, it cannot be wrong in a church to consult the opinions and wishes of the more stable and serious (I will not say the richer) members of the congregation. The purest of all principles,—desire that such members may receive spiritual benefit,—will sanction, and, indeed, require this mode of proceeding : yet, when it is adopted, the church must take especial care not to convey the notion that it can, for a moment, sanction the anomalous and unscriptural position of those who profess to have received the Gospel, while they stand aloof from the visible body of the Lord's people.

It has been denied, however, that the election of the pastor should be confided to the members of the church,—denied on the ground of expediency, and on the ground of Scripture. Its members are unable, it is said, to decide who is best fitted to take the oversight of them in the Lord ; and, in the cases of election to the pastoral office, of which we have any record in the New Testament, the appointment was made by the apostles, or by others who did not belong to the body over which the pastor was called to preside. The first argument I am disposed to meet with a direct negative. Provided Christian churches preserve the purity of the body, by retaining in their fellowship those only who give evidence of the possession of real religion, I would trust the election of pastors to them rather than to any king, or prime minister, or patron in the world. The latter argument overlooks the distinction, which is to be immediately illustrated, between election to the pastoral office, and induction into it. The latter was not, as we shall presently see, by the church itself, though we have every ground for confidence that the former was so, and that it ought, accordingly, to be so in the present day : for, first, no society brought and held together by voluntary consent—and we have seen

that such is the nature of a Christian church,—can be rendered subject to any but by its own volition. What power on earth has a right to *force* a pastor upon such a body? or, if the force should be attempted, and even prove successful, how could the members of the body voluntarily obey the minister whom their judgment and conscience disapprove?—and if they could not voluntarily obey him, how could their obedience, if extorted, be acceptable to God? Every thing in religion—in social religion—must be voluntary, or it is worthless. The pastor must *choose* the flock,—the flock the pastor. The former must take the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly;—the latter must cheerfully submit to that oversight, or the Great Head of the Church cannot be expected to approve and bless the union.

Secondly. The members of a church, being responsible to God for the religious sentiments they hold, must have the liberty of rejecting those teachers whom they consider likely to lead them into error, and of electing such as may appear to them best adapted to instruct them in the ways of God more thoroughly. This liberty must, we say, be enjoyed; for how could a man be responsible to God for his health, who was compelled to swallow poison? The Apostle John directed the elect lady not to receive into her house any teacher who brought a doctrine different from that which he had taught: and he added, “For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds,” 2 John 10, 11. Now what can be more monstrous than to suppose that a number of Christians, who, in their private capacity, must act in this manner towards a minister who brings “another gospel which is not another,” may be lawfully compelled, as an associated body, to admit this very minister into their pulpit, and to officiate there permanently; and thus expose themselves and families to the risk of error, apostacy, and damnation?

Thirdly. The members of a church are commanded to know those who are over them in the Lord, “and

to esteem them very highly in love, for their work's sake." 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. But how could such a precept have been given?—for how can it, in all cases, be obeyed, unless the right of electing the pastor be in the church, and it be thus competent to its members to select an individual for that office, possessed of those intellectual and spiritual qualifications without which no being can regard him with either esteem or love?

Fourthly. The approbation and choice of the Christian people were sought previously to appointment to the inferior office of deacon, and to the superior office of apostle, when, in the last case, man had any concern in the appointment; it may, accordingly, be presumed with confidence, that their consent and sanction would be obtained before ordination to the pastorate. "The twelve," we read, Acts vi. 2—6, "called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables; wherefore, brethren, look ye out among yourselves seven men of good report," &c. &c.—"And the saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen," &c. Again, when Peter, standing up in the midst of the disciples, had unfolded the accomplishment of prophecy in the destruction of Judas, he added, "Wherefore, of those men who have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out before us,"—"must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." And as the saying pleased the whole multitude, "they appointed two; Joseph, called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias." Acts i. 15, 21, 23.

Now it is not expressly affirmed, we grant, that the election or choice of the Christian people thus preceded ordination to the pastorate. All that is said is, that Paul and Barnabas "ordained elders in every church," Acts xiv. 23; hence some have been rash enough to maintain that there was no previous election of the individuals to be ordained,—or that the apostles elected

as well as ordained them,—and elected them without obtaining, or even seeking, the concurrence of the people. No cautious man will, however, venture to affirm this. How can he be sure of it? The historian merely gives an account of the solemn induction of these individuals into office. . . . There may have been a previous formal election, by each church, of the men who were afterwards ordained; or some other visible manifestation of the approval of the church previous to ordination, even if the apostles first suggested them. We do not say that our history asserts this: but neither does it assert, or even imply, the contrary. But we maintain that, taking the considerations already adduced into the account, no reasonable doubt can be entertained that the ordained persons were such as had the confidence and approbation of the church, and that, if this had not been the case, even the apostles would not have inducted them into office.*

I have built my conclusion, that the individuals ordained by Paul and Barnabas were, at least, virtually elected by the church, on these general considerations, rather than on an argument deduced by many, from the Greek word employed by the sacred writer here. I ought, however, to apprise the reader, who may not be already aware of it, that that word, viz. (*χειροτονω*), translated 'ordain,' is derived from a verb which means to extend, or stretch out, and a noun signifying the hand; so that its proper signification is to elect or choose to office by the lifting up of the hand. When the apostles are said, then, to have ordained elders, the writer using this word, some have thought that he

* "It is not less absurd," says one, "to maintain that because we have no direct example of a church choosing its own elders, that this matter is left undetermined, than it would be to argue, that since the word of God has not declared that the marriage union is to be entered into by mutual choice, it is doubtful whether this be required. Such obvious principles as necessarily result from our nature and circumstances, are frequently taken for granted in Scripture."

ordained them by calling up a show of hands in their favour. Now candour obliges me to say, that, though no one can disprove this, we cannot be sure that this process took place; both because the word is sometimes used for appointment to office when there could be no show of hands; and, further, because a different word is employed by Paul, in his Epistle to Titus, in reference to the ordinations in which the latter officiated.

The second step in the process by which a bishop or pastor becomes invested with office, is his solemn induction into it, by fasting and prayer, and the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. This is to be carefully distinguished from the previous step; and it is in this second step, consequent upon the former, that the essence of ordination is to be found. There are, indeed, certain ultra-Independents who maintain that the choice of the people is ordination, and is not merely a previous step to it. Averse from ultraism in every thing, I cannot be reconciled to it here. The New Testament doctrine manifestly is, that the people elect, but not ordain. The distinction, thus briefly glanced at, is so distinctly marked that one cannot but wonder how any should be able to overlook it. "Wherefore, brethren," said the twelve to the multitude, "look ye out among you seven men," &c. "whom we may appoint over that business." It was Paul and Barnabas, and Timothy and Titus, that ordained; though, as we believe, subsequently to the virtual election by the church of the persons to be ordained. If, indeed, it could be proved that the two former were ordained by merely collecting the suffrages of the people, then it would, of course, follow that the church's choice of an individual to be over them in the Lord is ordination; and that the solemn services which generally succeed election to office are only to be considered in the light of appendages to it. But this, as we have seen, cannot be proved. It may be added, also, that, if this notion of the essence of the rite were the correct one, it is difficult to see what necessity existed

for Titus to be left in Crete for the express purpose of ordaining elders. The people could surely have collected the suffrages of the body themselves. Why appoint an evangelist for this purpose, when, as it cannot but appear to us, he might have been far better employed.

Ordination is, then, the orderly and solemn induction of an individual into the pastoral office subsequent to the election of the church, and dependent upon it. A question then arises here, viz. by whom is the pastor to be thus inducted? By the bishop, of course, says the Episcopal church: how can there be ordination without a bishop? It is quite impossible to state the amount of gratitude which sophistry owes to ambiguous terms. Here is a fallacy resting upon an ambiguity,—the ambiguity of the term bishop; for, is it intended to denote a diocesan bishop, or a scriptural bishop?—two very different things. A scriptural bishop is the pastor of a particular church; a diocesan, or a lord bishop, is one who has no especial connexion with any congregation, but authority given by the state (remember!) over a number of congregations, together with their pastors and deacons. When an Episcopalian asserts that there can be no ordination without a bishop, he ought to mean, of course, without a diocesan, or lord bishop; or he proves nothing against us, at whose ordinations scriptural bishops invariably officiate. But how can he establish that? Paul and Barnabas ordained. Were they diocesan bishops? Certainly not. They were apostles, not bishops, either in the Congregational or Episcopalian sense of the word. Should it be replied,—though the reply would, we apprehend, give up the argument,—that the higher office possessed all the right and authority of the lower, we would add, that Timothy and Titus ordained. Were they diocesan bishops? This has indeed been affirmed, but not proved; nor can it be proved. They were extraordinary officers, endowed with the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, required by the emergency

of the times, and ceasing with that emergency. Hence, when the character and qualifications of the permanent office-bearers of the church are described by Paul in his epistles to Timothy and Titus, they are not even alluded to. Their principal office, as we gather from the name which designates it, was to preach the Gospel in places to which the personal labours of the apostles could not be extended. That office, it is obvious, far more nearly resembles that of Christian missionaries, than of diocesan bishops. Besides, how were Timothy and Titus ordained? Our answer is, by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. "Neglect not," said Paul to Timothy, "the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with (*μετὰ*) the laying on of the hands of the presbytery," 1 Tim. iv. 14. Now, as we learn from 2 Tim. i. 6, that the supernatural gifts of the Spirit were conferred upon Timothy by the imposition of the apostle's hands exclusively, the easiest mode, if not the only mode, of reconciling the two apparently conflicting passages, is to suppose that supernatural gifts were imparted to Timothy by the apostle, but that he was set apart, or ordained to the work of an evangelist, by the accompanying imposition of the hands of the Presbytery.

Here, then, we have ordination without the presence of any diocesan bishop, for the presbyters were ordinary pastors. Indeed, the office of a diocesan, or lord bishop, is a creature of the imagination, to be met with in works of fiction, but not in the Scriptures of truth. In the ordinations by Timothy and Titus themselves, there was induction into office without the presence of a bishop in any proper sense of the term; yet not without the presence of an office-bearer in the church; and the whole facts of the case lead to the general conclusion, that newly elected pastors should be inducted into office by those who already sustain it. If there be an aged pastor, with whom a young minister is to be associated in office, he ought, I apprehend, to bear the principal part, at least, of the service. If the young minister is to stand

alone, the neighbouring pastors will officiate ; and thus, while the junior brother is favourably introduced into the pastoral fellowship, the unity of the one body, formed by the churches of Christ, though there are many members, is very strikingly exhibited.

II. The nature and extent of the authority with which it invests him.

That the bishop or pastor is, by ordination, actually invested with authority, is manifest from the exhortation of the apostle, Heb. xiii. 17. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves : for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account," &c. It becomes, then, especially desirable to ascertain, if it can be done, the precise kind and degree of this authority. Few things are more to be deprecated than disputes, or even differences of opinion, between a minister and his people, on this exceedingly delicate subject ; yet, when right and authority remain in any degree undefined, there is obviously great danger that misunderstandings on this point may arise. The wholesome desire, on the one hand, of repressing democracy, and, on the other, of resisting unlawful efforts to lord it over God's heritage, may place, and have sometimes actually placed, both minister and people in a false position. Each party may possibly suspect that it is not altogether right ; but as the other cannot prove it to be decidedly wrong, both persist in their course ; and the unhappy result is, that mutual coolness and suspicion increase, till a violent rupture terminates the unseemly strife, and breaks the ill-assorted union. If, then, any additional light can be thrown on this subject, considerable service will be rendered to the Church of God. With some hope that the following remarks may not be altogether useless, they are respectfully laid before the reader.

It is conceived, then, to be of some consequence to remember, and it may be of advantage to our ministerial brethren to remember, that their authority, whatever it may be, does not extend to any thing not coming fairly

within the limits and range of the pastoral office. It is, indeed, chiefly, if not exclusively, confined to the application and execution of the laws of Christ, in regard to the church as an associated body. In reference to any thing beyond this, though a minister may give his opinion, he should not expect that it will carry with it more of authority than that with which the opinion of a wise and holy man will always be clothed. It is possible, however, for youth and inexperience to forget that a right to rule in some things, does not confer the right of ruling in every thing; and that a man who unwisely stretches the prerogative, and aims at being master in all things, may ultimately find himself master in nothing. Far greater is the importance than is sometimes imagined, of confining the exercise of the pastoral authority within legitimate bounds. In that case it may be exerted, where it should be exerted, more vigorously, with less risk of opposition or questioning, and with incomparably more advantage to the church. The notion we entertain of what is an undue extension of ministerial authority may be illustrated by the following case:—All applications for pecuniary aid in the erection of new places of worship, or in support of those noble institutions which aim at evangelizing the world, are sometimes admitted or rejected by the minister exclusively (and the right is contended for of thus admitting or rejecting them,) without consultation with the deacons, or any other members of the church. This is surely not the most correct mode of proceeding. Certainly the pastor has a right to give or withhold his personal sanction of the application; but by mere pastoral authority to forbid or grant the application, is practically to assume the right which no man possesses to govern others in the application of their property. It exposes ministers, also, to reflections and suspicions which it is very desirable for them to avoid.

Again, it is to be remembered that the authority of the pastor is not legislative but ministerial. His proper

work is to expound, and apply, and execute the laws which have issued from the Son of God, occupying as he does, exclusively, the legislative throne, and permitting no one to infringe upon this his undoubted prerogative. In short, the pastor rules by making the Lord Jesus Christ rule; by showing what He directs, commands, forbids. He has no authority independent of his Master, or separate from his. Forgetful of this important sentiment, should he enact laws, and then attempt to enforce them, the people would not be bound to obey; the people ought not to obey. Obedience would, in that case, be a practical dethroning of the exalted King in Zion. And should the pastor unwisely bring the authority of his office, instead of the authority of Christ, to enforce even an admitted enactment of the latter, he would be in danger of corrupting the principle of obedience, and of miscarrying after all. A right-minded minister will not desire to see *himself*, but the *Saviour*, reign over the people. Jealous for his Master's honour, he will shrink from the thought of dividing the supremacy with him. He covets not the obedience of the church on his own account, but for the honour of his Lord; and thus, placing before the people not himself but Christ, as the actual ruler, he secures, when the conscience is in subjection to Divine authority, the obedience he enforces.

Still there may be thought to be some degree of indefiniteness in these statements. The proper business of the pastor is, we have stated, to expound, apply, and to execute the laws of Christ. But, if there should be a difference of opinion between him and the church, in reference either to the meaning or the application of a law, are its members, in a case awaiting their decision, bound to take the pastor's exposition of the law, and to walk by his opinion of its application, when their judgment is at variance with his? Every candid man will admit that there is some difficulty here. If we maintain the *affirmative*, there appears to be no guard against the

pastor's lording it over God's heritage ; if the negative, we seem to open the door at once for confusion, and anarchy, and every evil work. The church is to obey the pastor ; but if the pastor is neither to make law, nor authoritatively to expound and to apply law, what room is there for obedience ? On the other hand, if the church is bound to act on the judgment of the pastor, even when they regard that judgment as erroneous, how can they obey Christ ? The only reply I feel able to give is, that, as the pastor is the authorised expounder of the laws of Christ, the church is bound to act on his judgment and direction, unless they can prove that he has misdirected them—the *onus probandi* being laid upon them for the evident purpose of repressing groundless and factious opposition. If it be objected, as perhaps it will, that this statement leaves it after all uncertain when a church is bound to yield obedience, and when it will be lawful to refuse it, I would reply, that a similar difficulty, if difficulty it be, is connected with the injunctions which bind the subject to obey the governor, the wife to obey the husband, the child to obey the parent. They seem to leave no case open for the refusal of obedience ; yet all admit that such cases may occur. The governor, the husband, the parent, must all be disobeyed, when God interposes his authority ; yet, as the instances where this is the case cannot be specified, the subject, wife, and child are thrown in every particular instance upon the decision of conscience in reference to the propriety of disobedience ; having upon them the *onus probandi* of showing that the higher authority of God compels them to disobey. If it be further objected, that the whole of these injunctions to obedience are too general and loose, I reply, that they are perhaps as definite as they should be, the great object of the Moral Governor being to test the existence of the spirit of obedience ; and, for this purpose, they are amply sufficient. In regard to a pastor and his flock, the difficulty referred to is rather speculative

than practical. When there exists fervent love between the parties—when there is no tendency to an improper assumption of power on the one hand, and no proneness to groundless and factious opposition on the other, there will be no disputes on this delicate point; and with respect to which disputes are especially to be deprecated and avoided.

The second class of office-bearers comprises those to whom the management of the temporal affairs of the church is especially intrusted. This is the department of service to which the deacon is called. The term employed to designate the office is too general to afford us any light in reference to its nature. It simply means a minister, or servant; and may, accordingly, be applied, and indeed is so, to individuals performing various kinds of service. It is used, for instance, to denote Christ, Rom. xv. 8; civil magistrates, Rom. xiii. 4; private Christians, John xii. 26; Paul and his companions, 1 Cor. iii. 5. By a common process of limitation, in reference to the meaning of terms, it came at length to denote that particular service which consists in distributing the alms of the church.

It is commonly thought that the origin, or institution of the office, is recorded in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. We read there that, "when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples to them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among yourselves seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business," &c.—vi. 1—4. These persons are not called deacons; and hence many have doubted whether their office identifies itself with that of the deacon referred to in the epistles of Timothy and Titus. It was intended, it has been

thought, to meet and provide for a temporary emergency; and was laid down when the disciples ceased to have all things common. Now it must be admitted that, in the service which the seven were required to perform, there were specialties not to be found in that of the deacon in the present day. Still I apprehend that the office of the latter, as to spirit at least, must be conceived to have originated at the time to which we now refer. There is substantially the same cause for it now as then. The poor, said our Lord, ye have always with you; their wants must be carefully supplied; and, it is in entire harmony with what we should have expected from the grace of Him who came to preach the Gospel to the poor, to appoint a distinct office-bearer in the church, who shall have it in charge to minister the fruits of the church's love to them, for the sake of their common Lord. Is there not something exceedingly delightful and touching in this appointment? How strikingly does it exhibit the benign spirit of Christianity! When and where did paganism thus practically care for the poor? It becomes, on this account, more important for churches not to suffer, where it can possibly be avoided, this office to remain in practical abeyance; since, while this is the case, they cease to give this visible and strong demonstration of their love to the poor of the Lord's people, and of their regard to his authority. We would not be understood as blaming any particular church. Circumstances, we are well aware, may render it impossible in many cases to fill up the deacon's office; yet a church, while destitute of deacons, should regard itself as in an imperfectly organized state; and should fervently implore the church's Head to supply to them that which is lacking.

The preceding statements have taken it for granted that the deacon is not a spiritual officer—that his specific work is to serve tables; the table of the Lord, as is generally supposed, the table of the minister, and the table of the poor. Now there is no one, certainly, who

ought to hold himself so immediately answerable for the supply of the minister's table as the deacon. Much of the comfort of the pastor, of the success of his ministrations, of the moral influence which the church should exert in its vicinity, depends upon the affectionate and efficient manner in which this duty is discharged ; yet I cannot withhold the opinion that it is the table of the poor, constituting a prominent part of the Lord's *κλῆρος*, or clergy, that the deacon is specifically appointed to observe and supply. No church, no deacon, must neglect this ; or will not the Master address them hereafter, " Because ye did it not to one of them, ye did it not to me ? "

It is contended by many, however, that the deacon is not appointed to manage the temporalities of the church merely,—that he is, in part at least, a spiritual officer ; being chosen, not, indeed, to preach, as the Episcopalians contend, but to aid the pastor in the discharge of his spiritual duties. The argument mainly relied on, in support of this view of the deacon's office, is the description given by Paul to Timothy of the necessary qualifications for that office. The deacons " must be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." They must be the " husbands of one wife, ruling their children, and their own houses well." 1 Tim. iii. 8—12. Why should these qualifications be required, if the deacon be called to nothing, by virtue of office, but to serve tables ? The argument appears to me completely neutralized by the qualifications required, in the case of the seven elected by the church at Jerusalem. They were unquestionably not spiritual office-bearers. They were chosen specifically and exclusively to serve tables. Yet it was required that they should be full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom, or faith. Should it be objected, that these qualifications were needed for the preaching of the word, in which they afterwards engaged, I answer, that the apostle's

language represents them as indispensable to their election to the deacon's office ; and, again, that they did not preach the word by any authority derived from their ordination as deacons, but in consequence of being filled with the Holy Ghost and wisdom ; i. e., being possessed of supernatural qualifications for preaching the Gospel. The edification of the church, and the diffusion of the Gospel, were necessarily committed, in the first instance, to the first fruits, or first converts to the Christian faith ; who without an exception, perhaps, were endowed with the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit : yet, though thus employed in pastoral and ministerial work, they were not formally ordained to it, the spiritual gifts which they possessed rendering such ordination unnecessary. The great reason for the requisition of the qualifications mentioned in Timothy, is, I apprehend, that as the deacon is a prominent man in a church, on whom even the eyes of those who are without will be fixed, it is necessary that, neither in reference to his personal conduct, nor to the management of his domestic concerns, should the adversary have any evil thing to say of him. Besides, the deacon, having obtained the confidence of his pastor and brethren, will, on that very account, be frequently employed in the spiritual concerns of the church,—in conversing with applicants for church-fellowship,—in investigating cases which require the discipline of the church, &c. It is necessary, therefore, that he possess the spiritual qualifications required, since he will be called upon, being the deacon, though not as deacon—the work being extra-official—to these important spiritual services.

It is a point of considerable practical importance to fix the precise nature and extent of the office now under consideration. Some having entered upon it with little knowledge of its nature, conceiving that it gave them a certain power in the church, without being very well able to say what power, have assumed, either through ignorance, or a desire of pre-eminence, an authority

which neither belongs to them, nor to the office. The church has, accordingly, sunk into a state of lay despotism—worse even than priestly despotism; or much vigorous and painful effort has been required to repress assumed authority; while the body has lost, at the same time, all the substantial benefit which it would have derived from a careful discharge of the specific duties of the office.

To guard against evils of this kind, some churches have resorted to the expedient of an annual election of deacons. Many powerful reasons may, however, be urged against this mode of proceeding: for, first, it removes us from the ground of Scripture to that of expediency;—a ground on which we do not wish to see Dissenters take up their position, though the enemy would not, we believe, be able to dislodge them from it. Secondly, it appears an unauthorised and unwise mode of attempting to remove evils from a church. “How easily,” say its advocates, “do we, by this mode, get rid of an unsuitable deacon!” Now, suppose this were admitted, it would fail to prove that it is the best mode. If the deacon *prove inattentive or negligent*, ought he not to be admonished, as was Archippus, the *pastor* of the church at Colosse? Can the church, not frankly and honestly apprising him of their dissatisfaction, (as it seems to become Christians,) fully discharge their duty by merely not re-electing him? If the deacon *more seriously misconduct himself*, he ought surely to be brought under the discipline of the church; and then its members would receive the very important lesson, that no one neglecting duty, or committing sin, be his station, or office, or respectability what it may, can escape the censure and discipline which the body is authorised to administer. Thirdly, if this mode of proceeding may be adopted in the case of the deacon, why restrict it to him? It might be urged, perhaps, with equal truth, that an annual election of members, or rather, an annual re-formation of the church, would free

it from the encumbrance of useless and unworthy communicants. But would cutting down the tree be the right method of getting rid of the dead branches? And, further, if the principle of annual election to one office in the church be admitted, some will be disposed to say, "Why should we not apply it to the other?" On the ground of expediency, an annual election to the pastorate may seem, to many, even more desirable than an annual election to the deaconship. An incompetent and negligent pastor is a greater nuisance than an incompetent and negligent deacon.

SECTION VII.

THE GOVERNMENT OF A CHURCH.

EVERY one is aware that no society can exist without government. Observation, testimony, our knowledge of human nature, combine to assure us that if a number of men, set loose from all control, were brought together, the cunning would overreach the simple,—the strong would oppress the weak,—the wise would triumph over the ignorant;—yea, all would bite and devour one another. The members of a Christian church must, then, be subjected to government. Now, as this is the case, there arises the following very interesting and important inquiry, viz., “*Have we a divinely-instituted form of government or not?*”

There are not a few who maintain the negative side of this question. They contend, that the government of the church is what has been called ambulatory; or, in other words, that it is left to the wisdom of men to vary the form of government, or, rather, to select and adopt any form which may appear most congruous with the previous customs, habits, opinions, or prejudices of those among whom the church is planted. Others maintain, on the other hand, that at least the great outlines of a form of church government are laid down in the New Testament; and that we are accordingly bound to establish every Christian church, in the present day, on this prescribed plan.

Against the first opinion, the *à priori* and the *à posteriori* arguments have been employed.

First. The statements in the *à priori* argument are to

the following effect :—that, as no human society can exist without government, it is not credible that Christ has left a society so important as the church without directions on this point ;—that human wisdom is incompetent to frame a code of laws, being liable to err even in temporal, and far more in spiritual concerns ;—that, when the great ends of church government are considered, it cannot fail to appear of the utmost importance that sufficient directions on this point should be given ; as the credit of religion, the advancement of piety and holiness, the encouragement of the good, and the restraint of the bad, so much depend upon a due administration of the laws, that a form of government was as necessary to the Christian, as to the Jewish church. It is, consequently, not to be supposed, that, while the government of the latter was so exactly delineated, that of the former is left to the invention and decision of fallible men !

Secondly. The reasonings in the *a posteriori* argument are derived from Divine revelation ; which, it is affirmed, either by direct statement, or by precedent in the practice of the first churches, or by necessary inference from what is written, supplies us, as it has been said, with the great outlines of church government.

It might have been added to the statements in the *a priori* argument, that if we have no divinely-revealed rule of government, it is manifest that no particular form can, in that case, be adopted and practised as an act of subjection to the authority of God. Christianity sinks, in reference to church government, to a level with the wild and senseless liberalism of ancient paganism, which did not hesitate to declare that the Roman deities were, properly, the gods of Rome,—the Grecians, the gods of Greece. Episcopacy may be the proper form for England,—Presbyterianism for Scotland :—Episcopalianism for the higher orders,—Congregationalism or Methodism for the lower. For my own part, I acknowledge that I can never believe this,—that there is no

right and wrong on a point of so great magnitude,—or that right and wrong can thus be determined by geographical boundaries, or artificial distinctions of rank and station. If I did not believe that the Congregational form of church government, in its essential characteristics at least, rests on the basis of Divine revelation, I should never urge its claims upon the attention of a single human being. On the ground of expediency I would not argue them, though they might be placed on that ground. I should leave every man to follow out that plan which he might deem best, assured that all, in their choice and determinations, would be equally acceptable to God.

But, then, if there be a divinely-appointed rule of church government, how comes it to pass that so many different opinions on this point prevail in the world? Might not a similar question, we ask, be put in reference to differences of opinion in relation to doctrinal subjects? If God has given a sufficiently distinct revelation of the person of Christ, for instance, how comes it to pass that some believe him to have been merely a man, and others, “God over all, blessed for evermore?” If, in the latter case, difference of opinion does not imply defect in the revelation, neither does it, in the former case, suppose impenetrable obscurity in the rule. “But all *Christians* agree,” we may be told, “in their views of the person of Christ: this is not, accordingly, a fair illustration.” Take, then, we reply, a case in which *Christians* differ in opinion;—take the difference which exists between the Calvinists and Arminians, or between the Pœdobaptists and the Anti-Pœdobaptists. Is the difference, in either of these cases, to be ascribed to a deficiency of clearness and fulness in the revelation? or to one or other of those various causes which may lead minds, on the whole conscientious, to embrace an erroneous opinion? I feel no hesitation in ascribing it to the latter source. I would shield the Author of the Bible from the charge of having, like the Pagan oracles,

veiled his communications in doubtfulness and ambiguity. Differences of opinion are to be ascribed to heedlessness, haste, prejudice, self-interest, and other causes; operating, it may be, unconsciously upon those who are subject to their influence; not to the darkness and uncertainty of Divine communications.

With the view of explaining and establishing the scriptural authority of the Congregational mode of church government, we shall place it in the light of contrast with several others; and, *first*, with the

POPISH FORM.

This mode of government maintains that there is a visible head of the church on earth, and that this head is the bishop of Rome, having the right of dominion over the whole Christian world, as the successor of Peter, formerly bishop of Rome, and who left, at his death, all his authority and prerogatives to those who should succeed him in that see. In opposition to this form of church government, it has been very justly argued that it rests on the three following assumptions, any of which giving way, subverts the whole system:—

It assumes, for instance, that Peter was the bishop of Rome,—that he possessed supremacy over the other apostles,—and that he had authority to transmit, and actually did transmit, this supremacy to his successors in the see of Rome.

Against the first assumption, that Peter was bishop of Rome, we maintain that the New Testament does not afford it even the shadow of support. No proof is supplied by this source that Peter was ever at Rome, far less that he was its bishop. The probabilities are, indeed, all on the other side. Paul wrote a long letter to Rome, in which, though he directs his salutations to be given to numbers, he does not mention Peter. Could Peter, then, have been the bishop of Rome, or even a resident in that city? Again: Paul wrote several epistles *from* Rome, during a residence in that

city extending to two full years ; but not one of them contains any reference to Peter.

We maintain, further, in opposition to the assumption, that the nature of the apostolical office sustained by Peter rendered it impossible for him to assume that of bishop. He was not, consequently, the bishop of Rome.

The primitive bishops resided in one place, and had the charge of the church which existed there ; but the apostles were appointed to be " witnesses to the Lord, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth," Acts i. 8.

Against the second assumption, viz., that Peter possessed supremacy over the other apostles, we argue that the Catholics have mistaken the meaning of the only passage to which they appeal for its support. That passage is as follows: " And I say also unto thee," said Christ, " that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church : and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," Matt. xvi. 18, 19. It were easy to show that the term *rock*, though it contains an allusion to the name, does not mean the person, but the confession of Peter. This is not, however, necessary ; since, whatever be its meaning, and whatever be the power of the keys which are here said to be given to Peter, the Roman Catholics must be able to show that the words confer an exclusive distinction upon Peter,—one in which his brethren in the apostleship did not participate,—or how could they raise him to supremacy ? It is, however, clearly and absolutely impossible that they should do this. For, in the first place, the whole church is declared by Paul, Eph. i. 20, to be built upon the foundation, not of Peter only, but of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone ; and, in the second place, the power of the keys was afterwards conferred upon the other apostles. For what is the

power of the keys? What is the office or use of a key? is it not to open and to shut? What was that power, then, as given to Peter, but authority to open the kingdom of heaven to men by preaching the reconciliation effected by Christ Jesus?—to declare infallibly to whom it should be open, and to whom it should be shut? or, in other words, to declare that he that believed should be saved, while he that believed not should be damned? Now this power was subsequently bestowed upon all the apostles. “Go ye,” said our Lord to them after his resurrection, “into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned,” Mark xvi. 15, 16.

It is also further manifest, that the Roman Catholics are mistaken in supposing that the words to which they appeal conferred supremacy upon Peter,—elevating him into a pope, in the present acceptation of the term, while the other apostles continued to form a kind of college of cardinals only,—from the fact that no such supremacy was conceded to him, or even imagined by his contemporaries. “I suppose,” said Paul on one occasion, “I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles,” 2 Cor. xi. 5. What! not behind Peter, if supreme?—not behind the pope? Well, but Paul, it may be said, excepted Peter, and merely intended to affirm his equality with the other apostles. I am afraid that gloss will scarcely harmonize with the term “chiefest,” selected, as by-design, by the apostle of the uncircumcision. But, if this little discrepancy be passed over, what shall we say of the *conduct* of Paul? “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed,” Gal. ii. 11. What! withstand one whose supremacy he acknowledged! withstand a pope! Surely Paul must have strangely forgotten himself,—or *Peter was not a pope*. The reader may take either of the suppositions he chooses: one of them he must take. But we have more evidence yet that the supremacy of

Peter was not acknowledged by the primitive church. "And the apostles and brethren, that were of Judea, heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God; and when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him." Acts xi. 1, 2. Contended with a pope,—and laymen too! Why, it is somewhat hazardous, in these days, for priests to contend with a bishop even, how much more so for laymen to contend with a pope! And then, moreover, Peter did not, in these circumstances, act very much like a pope. He did not say, You unreasonable, disbelieving heretics, if you do not surrender your faith to my opinions, and your approbation to my conduct, I will shut you up in the Inquisition, and send the thumb-screw and the rack to convince you how causeless are your doubts. He forgot his supremacy, which his successors never do, and reasoned with them as any rational man would do; in fact, more like an apostle than a pope. To be sure, there were no Inquisitions,—no Star-chambers in those days. The church then, and the apostles at her head, were weak enough to think that the truth, with the Divine blessing, might be trusted to its own powers of conviction and persuasion. They had not then learnt the better and more approved art of silencing opposition by cutting out the opposer's tongue; nor of extirpating heresy by exterminating the heretic himself. That art was reserved for later times, when the church was in the acme of her temporal glory, but when Ichabod was inscribed upon her temples: for, seriously and solemnly, we would declare of any church which practises and sanctions persecution, that it must be a church of Belial, and not of Jesus Christ.

The third assumption of the Catholics, viz., that Peter had authority to transmit, and that he actually did transmit, this supremacy to his successors in the see of Rome, scarcely deserves notice; for if Peter was not the bishop of Rome, and did not possess supremacy over the other

apostles, as we trust we have proved, he could, of course, transmit none to his successors. But I am disposed to say to the Romanists, that, if they could sustain the two former assumptions, they would fail in supporting this : for, in the *first* place, we have no evidence, not even a particle, of its being the will of Christ that there should always be a visible head of the church on earth ; or, *secondly*, if so, that the bishop of Rome should be that head. *Thirdly*, the ancient church were ignorant of any such supremacy, and resisted all attempts to assume it. Even a bishop of Rome anathematized the bishop of Constantinople for assuming the very title in which the successors of the former now glory. He could not, then, at that time, have assumed it himself. *Fourthly*. "It is incredible," says one, "that Jesus Christ intended that they should be his vicegerents, whose ignorance and profligacy have stamped their names with infamy."

THE EPISCOPALIAN FORM.

The distinguishing characteristic of this form of government is, that it vests the whole power of ruling in a class of office-bearers, with the distinctive name of bishops, who are declared to constitute a higher order of officers than the ordinary presbyters or clergy, and who are, consequently, clothed with this superior authority. The priest, or presbyter, may read prayers, preach, administer the sacraments, and pronounce absolution upon penitents ; but in the government of the church he has no share whatever,—the bishop engrossing the whole. The preceding statements exhibit all that is essential to episcopacy. In the Church of England, as it is improperly called,—for it is now the church of a fraction only of the population,—the government is vested in diocesan bishops ; i. e., not men presiding singly *over a particular congregation*, with two or more presbyters, it may be, acting with them, or rather under

their direction; but *over a number of congregations*, together with their presbyters, located within certain geographical limits, generally fixed by the civil power to which the whole body is attached,—the alliance constituting, as I am constrained to think, spiritual adultery, in condemnation of which much is said in the inspired volume. This is diocesan episcopacy, in distinction from simple episcopacy, as it exists, I believe, in America. The former (at least, English diocesan episcopacy,) does not render it the duty of the bishop to preach. He may preach, indeed, as we have already seen, but it is not a part of his office. He is appointed to rule.

Now it is manifest that the system of episcopacy rests upon the assumption that bishops are a higher order of ministers than others. If it can be shown that bishop and presbyter are, in the New Testament, convertible terms,—that a bishop is a presbyter, and a presbyter a bishop, the whole fabric of episcopacy sinks to the ground. We have already done this in the chapter on the office-bearers of the church; to which the reader, whose memory should not instantly supply him with those proofs of this important point which were then adduced, is requested to refer. On this form of government it is not necessary to say more.

THE CONGREGATIONAL AND PRESBYTERIAN FORM.

It will be advantageous to consider these two forms of government together, placing, as we proceed, the distinctive features of each in the light of contrast.

The two essential principles of the Congregational form of church government, and, as it appears to me, the only two which serve, at least, to distinguish it from the Presbyterian form, are as follows:—First, That a single congregation of visible believers, agreeing to walk together in the faith and order of the Gospel, is a complete church; and, secondly, that every such congregation has the entire power of government within itself. In

opposition to these principles, Presbyterians contend that such separate congregations constitute only a part of the church, which consists properly of a number of such congregations; and, further, that the entire (because not final) power of government is not lodged in each separate congregation,—that there is a right of appeal from the lowest church court, (which is not, be it observed, the body of church members with their pastor or pastors at their head,—for presbyterianism does not allow any application for church fellowship, or any case of discipline, to be laid before the body of church members at all, but before the office-bearers exclusively,) called the kirk session, consisting of the preaching and lay elders of a particular congregation, to a higher tribunal, viz., the presbytery, composed of representatives from the kirk sessions of a certain district. It generally establishes, also, a yet higher court, viz., the synod; and sometimes, also, a more splendid and imposing one than the synod, viz., the General Assembly; both of which, like the presbytery, are courts of appeal: so that the decision of the kirk session may be reviewed, first, by the presbytery, then by the synod, and finally by the General Assembly; in either of which courts it may affirmed, or reversed, at the pleasure of the court.

Now there is, I admit, something in this form of church government which, *primâ facie*, is rather seductive. It might, for instance, appear at the first blush, that to take the full and final power of government from particular congregations, and to establish this regular gradation of courts of appeal, might tend, on the one hand, to repress the spirit of turbulence and commotion in these individual congregations; and, on the other, to secure the certainty of justice being done between conflicting parties, in any particular case, by removing the ultimate decision from prejudiced to unprejudiced judges. So far as I think it right to go into a reply to these arguments, I should, perhaps, admit that it might

tend, as supposed, to suppress turbulence ; but so would imprisoning or hanging the quarrellers ; and, therefore, as the latter would not be the right course, though it drew after it this good consequence, so neither may the former. And, though it is confidently affirmed that greater justice would be done to the conflicting parties by following the Presbyterian model, I more than doubt it. Innumerable cases will occur in which it will be utterly impossible to put a foreign court into an equal capacity of judging correctly with the congregational court. Our opinion as to what should be done, in any case of offence for instance, does not altogether, sometimes not chiefly, depend upon the overt act, but upon the previous character of the offender—upon his manner when dealt with—his countenance—tones of voice even. No adequate impression of these things can be conveyed to such as did not see and hear them. It is conceived, then, that any advantage which might be derived, in a foreign court—if there be any advantage, which, however, is doubtful—from freedom from local prejudice and prepossession, would be more than counterbalanced by inferior capacity of judging.

Besides, what must be the consequence, in many cases at least, of removing the power of final decision from the congregational court ? How can it avoid happening that an individual, cast out by the latter court, as one in whom its members have lost confidence, and whom they find it impossible to love, will, by the superior court, be thrown back into their fellowship ? and thus the great principle which binds the members together—the principle of voluntary combination—is rudely violated.

I feel reluctant, however, to prosecute this argument further, because it evidently removes us from scriptural ground. It raises the question, "What thinkest thou ?" The exclusive inquiry should be, "How readest thou ?" I place the congregational form of church government on the basis of Divine revelation, and not on the ground of expediency ; and shall, accordingly, proceed to test

the great principles in which the two forms we are now considering differ from each other, by comparing both with the word and testimony of God. These differing principles we have stated to be but two. Dr. Dick, indeed, the latest and most respectable advocate of the Presbyterian scheme, refers to another principle or two, in reference to which Independents, as he imagines, differ from Presbyterians. The former, he says, maintain that the power of government is vested in the church collective, or in the body of the faithful; and that the rulers derive their authority from the people: against both of which sentiments he, of course, strongly protests.

We reply, to the first part of this statement, that it misrepresents the principles of congregationalism. It is not denied, indeed, that there may have existed, in certain congregations of this order, a species of spiritual democracy, which reduces pastors to the same level with their people; but this is a departure from the principles of the system. Real congregationalism is not democracy. It maintains, indeed, that every separate congregation of believers *has the entire power of government within itself*; but it does not teach that that power is vested in the private members of the church. It admits, and affirms, in common with other systems, that pastors alone are the rulers of the church; but it more fully explains the nature, and limits the extent, of their authority than they. It teaches that pastors are in no sense legislators—that they rule not by making laws, but by executing those which the Saviour has instituted. It teaches, further, that they are not authorised to execute even His laws without the concurrence of the church. Carson, in his reply to Brown, makes a distinction between ruling and judging: the pastor rules, he states, by exhibiting the law of Christ which bears upon each separate case that comes under the cognizance of the church; the people judge of the application of the law. It may be admitted that this distinction is substantially correct, but the facts of the case may, it is apprehended, be

be better stated. The pastor rules by explaining the meaning of the laws of Christ, and showing their bearing upon the specific case before the church; and the flock are bound to the execution of the law thus expounded, unless they can show scriptural ground for another mode of proceeding than the one recommended by the pastor, the *onus probandi*, as we have seen, being thrown upon them. They must, indeed, judge whether he has given a right exposition of the law, as well as of its proposed application; still, they are not called specifically and officially to sit in judgment, but to give their consent to the execution of the law of Christ. And thus, the infinite wisdom of the great Head of the church has provided a sufficient guard against democratic insubordination on the one hand, and priestly domination on the other.

In regard to the other statement of Dr. Dick's, viz; that pastors derive their authority not from the people, but from Christ; I would suggest that there does not exist so much difference between us and himself as he seems to imagine. He admits that in apostolic times, the people possessed and exercised the right of electing their pastors; but denies that the former could invest the latter with office, or confer authority upon them. I apprehend that most Congregationalists who have reflected maturely upon the subject, would concur with him in the latter statement. They allow, as we have seen, that the act of election by the people, is a previous step to appointment to office, but not the appointment itself; and that the right or power of ordination is vested in official men. They would further allow, also, it is imagined, that the authority of the pastor, after his induction into office, to do what he actually does, is derived from the appointment and laws of Christ. He does not, for instance, teach and rule, because chosen by the people to teach and rule; but because Christ has connected these duties with the pastoral office; though

certainly these duties are discharged among them, and not others, in consequence of their election.

I proceed, then, to an examination of **THE FIRST GREAT PRINCIPLE IN CONTEST BETWEEN CONGREGATIONALISTS AND PRESBYTERIANS: viz., whether a single congregation of believers, agreeing to walk together in Christian fellowship, is a complete church, or only a fragment of a church—the term properly denoting a number of such congregations maintaining the same faith and order, and forming one large body or denomination.** The second point in contest between us, viz., whether a single congregation has the entire power of government within itself, depends so obviously and necessarily upon the decision we come to in reference to the first, (for if a single congregation *be* a complete church, it *must* have in itself the full power of government, or how could it be a complete church? if it be *not* a complete church, it is equally manifest that it can *not* have the full power of government, or it could not be otherwise than a complete church,) that both points might be resolved into one, and treated of as one. Our opponents have, however, separated them, and some advantages may possibly result from their separate consideration.

Now it will aid us, in coming to a decision upon the first point, to remember the facts of the case, in reference to the *usus loquendi* of the word church in the New Testament. Let it be recollected, then, that there are unquestioned and unquestionable instances of the use of the word in the Congregational sense. It is, indeed, the ordinary custom of the apostles and evangelists to call a single congregation of believers a church. On the other hand, there is no unquestioned and unquestionable case in which the word church is used in the Presbyterian sense. There are, indeed, passages in which our brethren of that denomination attempt, by the help of conjectural criticism, to show that the word must be used in that sense; but, if we can show that it may even

there bear the Congregational sense, the recognised laws of criticism justify us in affirming that it ought to be taken in that sense.

The great, perhaps I might say the only, argument on which the Presbyterians rely, in support of that sense of the term which they affirm to be its proper meaning in the New Testament, is its application to the whole body of the faithful at Jerusalem. "We never read," says Dr. Dick, "of the churches, but the church of Jerusalem." That is, doubtless, true; but now observe the inference: there must have been, he thinks, taking the multitude of the disciples into account, many distinct and regularly organised congregations in Jerusalem, each having its full complement of church officers; and therefore, the word church is used here in the Presbyterian sense; that is, one church made up of separate congregations. He does add, indeed, as a subsidiary argument, to which he evidently does not attach much importance, that many persons were employed in performing the ordinary ministrations, and that there would not have been work enough for them in a separate congregation; thus forgetting that what he calls *ordinary* ministrations and work, must have been very *extraordinary* in those extraordinary times. He affirms, lastly, that there was no place large enough for the whole body of the believers to meet in. Upon the whole of this argument I observe,

First, that whatever difficulty the number of disciples in Jerusalem might seem at first view to throw upon the Congregational sense of the word church, in the passages to which we now refer, there is nothing in the whole of the narrative to sanction the Presbyterian conception of its meaning. Who can believe that, at that time, there existed in Jerusalem a number of distinct and regularly organized congregations, having each its elders, kirk-session, &c.; and that representatives from these kirk-sessions met regularly in presbytery to conduct the spiritual concerns of the body? Any man who

does believe it, must surely have forgotten every circumstance of the case ; the infancy of the religion, and of the church, scarcely indeed a few days old ; the difficulty in all cases of breaking up old organizations, and forming new ones ; the fierce persecutions to which the faithful were exposed ; the necessity under which they were, occasionally at least, placed of holding their meetings in secret through fear of the Jews, &c. Regularly organized congregations in these circumstances ! Dr. Dick surely did not sufficiently transfer himself in imagination from Glasgow to Jerusalem, or he would not have rested his conclusion upon an argument of this kind.

Secondly. That though we rejoice to believe that the number of disciples in Jerusalem was very great, it may have been overrated by Presbyterians. They assume that the five thousand mentioned Acts iv. 3, were additional to the three thousand referred to in the second chapter, v. 41, 42. Now, though we do not wish to disprove this assumption, it ought to be borne in mind that the latter may be included in the former.

Thirdly. That how large soever may have been the number of disciples at Jerusalem, the greater part were strangers, who had come up to worship at the feast. How can we then suppose that permanent provision (by forming distinct congregations, securing various places of worship,) would be made to meet merely a present emergency ? Presbyterians are obliged to admit that a portion of the disciples were of this description, but represent that portion as very inconsiderable. The history, on the contrary, *vide* Acts ii. 1, 2, renders it manifest that the main body were not residents in the city.

Fourthly. That there are sufficient indications that the body of disciples at Jerusalem constituted but one church, in the Congregational sense of the term. We have *negative evidence of this* ; for, if distinct congregations had been formed, as the Presbyterians affirm, how

comes it to pass that not even the most distant hint of this is directly given to us in any part of the history? We have *positive evidence of this*: "Then they that gladly received his words," says the historian, "were baptized; and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." "And all that believed were together, and had all things common." "And, continuing daily with one accord in the temple," &c. "Did eat their meat with gladness, and singleness of heart." Acts ii. 41—46. In these words they are obviously represented as one congregation, having fellowship in the ordinances; they ate the Lord's Supper together; they *were together*; they continued with one accord in the temple, &c. Further on in the history, we find them still one unbroken body. When Peter and John were let go, they "went," we are told, "to their *own company*; and reported all that the chief priests and-elders had said unto them." Acts iv. 23; "and when they had prayed *the place was shaken*," it is added, "where they were *assembled together*,"—v. 31. In Acts v. 12, they are represented as "being all with one accord in Solomon's porch." It was to the whole body of disciples that the twelve addressed themselves previously to the election of deacons. They "called," it is said, "the multitude of the disciples unto them." This same multitude selected the individuals who should be appointed to that office; "for the saying," it is added, "pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen," &c. The history renders it impossible to conceive that this multitude was broken down into distinct congregations, and that each congregation selected its own deacons. In Acts xv. 4, and 23, the whole church is expressly said to have met, and transacted business; and this church consisted not of the apostles and elders merely; according to Presbyterian notions, for it is contradistinguished from them, v. 4, and 22: it contained the

brethren mentioned, v. 23; the whole multitude, v. 12; certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, v. 4.

It is plain, then, that the multitude of believers was not broken down into distinct regularly organised congregations. No foundation for this notion exists but mere conjecture. The whole current of the history goes directly to support the opinion that, during the period of time which that history embraces, the disciples in Jerusalem remained one unbroken body; meeting probably for social worship (as different sections of large Congregational churches in the present day do) at different times and places; but assembling at certain periods, and transacting the whole of the business which concerned the body, when the multitude was gathered together. It is worse than useless for Presbyterians to tell us that the multitude must have been formed into distinct and separate congregations, because one place could not have contained them, while we find it expressly declared that they did come together and into one place, and that that place was sometimes, and may have been at all times, Solomon's porch.

When to all this it is added, that, by the confession of our opponents themselves, the ordinary sense of the word church is a congregation, we shall not be prevailed upon to believe that, in reference to the disciples in Jerusalem, there is a departure from this signification, by such arguments as our Presbyterian brethren are in the habit of producing.

We proceed now to an examination of THE SECOND GREAT POINT IN CONTEST BETWEEN THE TWO DENOMINATIONS; viz. whether every separate church has the full power of government within itself, so that the Congregational is the ultimate court; or whether there should be a gradation and subordination of courts, and a right of appeal from an inferior court to a superior court, the decision of the latter being binding upon the former. Dr. Dick produces the following reasons in support of the notions and practices of his own church.

I. This is, he says in substance, a fair deduction from what we have already established concerning the union of several congregations in one church at Jerusalem. They were one, he adds, by being under one general government. Each assembly regulated its own ordinary affairs ; but when any extraordinary case arose, it was referred to the council of the presbyters, and decided by its authority. The reply of Congregationalists to this argument is, of course, that our opponent has failed to establish the explanation he gives of the term church. His imagination has been at work in dividing what remained in fact an unbroken body.

II. "We have distinct examples," says Dr. Dick, "in the New Testament, of appeals from an inferior to a superior court."

The passage relied upon is Acts, chapter xv., containing an account of the dissensions which arose at Antioch in reference to the necessity of circumcision, and the mission of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem with a view to the decision of the controversy. The argument of Presbyterians is as follows. The inferior court at Antioch, not being able to terminate this controversy, appealed to the superior court at Jerusalem, which gave forth a decree, binding, in consequence of the authority vested in it as a superior court, upon the whole Christian world. It is further maintained, that this single case warrants their plan of forming standing local ecclesiastical courts, having a gradation of rank,—of subjecting the decisions of the lower courts to the higher, and of vesting the ultimate and binding authority with the latter. Upon this argument, I respectfully submit the following observations to the careful consideration of the reader :—

First. On the principles of the Presbyterians, the inferior court must be represented in the superior, or it cannot be bound by its decisions. This, it must be carefully borne in mind, is a radical principle of Presbyterianism, which is throughout a system of representa-

tion. The Presbytery or Synod would have no power whatever to enforce the obedience of the inferior court, did not that court appear there by its representatives. The kirk-session sits, in effect, in the presbytery; the former, accordingly, binds itself in the decisions of the latter, as every man taxes himself in or by his representatives in the Commons' house of parliament.

Secondly. There were not representatives, at this pretended council, from the churches of God which have existed subsequently to the time when it was held, yet its decree has been binding upon them: and, moreover, it will have the force of law, in regard to all churches, till the end of the world.

Thirdly. There is not a particle of evidence that, at this pretended council, there were representatives even from the churches in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia, to which the decree of the council was immediately sent, and over which it had, and exercised, the force of law. Dr. Dick admits that it is doubtful whether delegates from the churches referred to did appear at the council. Brown, the great champion of Presbyterianism, wishes to represent their presence, or the contrary, as a point of no consequence. This is, however, I cannot avoid saying, little better than delusion. The cause of Presbyterianism we must hold to be lost,—absolutely—irrecoverably lost, (as far, at least, as this argument is concerned,) unless it can be proved that delegates appeared at this council from all the churches on which the decree is binding. Non-representation in the council, on the very principles of Presbyterianism, deprived that council of authority to the extent in which it prevailed.

Fourthly. If it were conceded that the assembly at Jerusalem was a council in the Presbyterian sense, having representatives from all the churches to which the decree was sent, still the facts of the case would overturn Presbyterianism; for the decree is not mentioned as being that of the apostles and elders merely, (who only have church power in their view,) but of the

private members also, who have, as they think, no ecclesiastical authority at all. Whether elders have the power of legislating for churches to which they do not personally belong, I do not at present inquire; but if Presbyterians answer in the affirmative, and justify their answer by an appeal to this supposed council at Jerusalem, then we maintain that they must allow the right of private members also thus to legislate, since the decree was that of the apostles, and elders, and *brethren*.

To remove this difficulty, some Presbyterians have intimated, rather than affirmed, that "the brethren" may have been elders, from the churches to which the decree was sent, forming part of the council. We cannot otherwise regard this gloss than as a strong practical acknowledgment of the pressure of the difficulty; for there is about as much evidence that the brethren were elders, as that they were men from the moon. The context totally forbids the supposition. They were obviously the whole church mentioned, verse 22,—all the multitude referred to, verse 15,—the church (contradistinguished, as we have seen, from the office-bearers,) by whom the deputation from Antioch was received, verse 24.

Fifthly. The Presbyterians must have mistaken the nature of this council, and the circumstance which gave authority to the decree; since no council, such as they conceive and describe this to have been, (i. e., a council deciding, not by the Spirit of inspiration, but by superior ecclesiastical authority) could have possessed power to decide authoritatively upon the truth or falsehood of a doctrine alleged to form an integral part of Christianity. Suppose that at this council there had been delegates, as conceived, from the churches in Antioch, &c., and that they had expressed an opinion that believing Gentiles needed not to be circumcised, can it be imagined that that opinion, if uninspired, as Presbyterians suppose, would have possessed power to bind the conscience of any church, or any man?

Sixthly. We maintain, then, that the facts of the case are these:—that this deputation was from the church at Antioch exclusively;—that its object was, first, to settle a point of doctrine, viz., whether believing Gentiles should be circumcised;—secondly, to decide upon a question of fact, viz., whether the certain men referred to, verse 1, had been authorised at Jerusalem, as they affirmed, to teach the necessity of circumcision. The point of doctrine could only be settled by inspired men: the question as to the fact, &c., might be determined, and was to be determined, by the church. It will be found, we trust, that this double view of the object of the deputation relieves from all difficulty.

That the church at Antioch both sought and received, from this council of Jerusalem, (if Presbyterians choose to call it so,) a decision, in reference to the point of doctrine, from the inspired men in that council, and not on the ground of its possessing higher church power, is manifest from the following considerations:—

First, from the fact that none but inspired men could have given the decision.

Secondly, from all the circumstances of the case. After some discussion,—chiefly, perhaps, between the Pharisees that believed, and some of the lay members of the church, and permitted, probably, by the apostles to elicit the views and feelings of the body,—one of the inspired men arose, and pronounced an authoritative decision against the necessity of circumcision. Then Paul and Barnabas gave in their report of the miracles and wonders which God had wrought among the Gentiles by them: and, as they resumed their seat, another inspired man arose, and, after a short introduction, proceeded as follows: “Wherefore *my sentence is*, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God. But that we write unto them that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood,” verses 19,

20; thus deciding the question at once by the Spirit of inspiration.

After the addresses of Peter and James, no vote was taken: the opinion of the council (as Presbyterians call it,) was not even asked. The whole body acquiesced in the decision of these apostles as infallible, and in the propriety of sending the decree to the Gentiles.

Further: those who sent this decision expressly declared that it "seemed good to the Holy Ghost" not to lay upon those to whom it went the burden of circumcision. No uninspired men, without inspired authority, would venture to adopt language of this kind. Against these statements and reasonings, it has been objected,

1st, That the church at Antioch, by sending the deputation, could not intend to terminate the dispute by the authority of inspiration, but by the higher ecclesiastical authority of the superior church court; because there were amongst them Paul and Barnabas, both inspired men, to whom they might have appealed, and whose decision would have been infallible.

The obvious reply to this objection is, that the false teachers doubtless stated that they had the authority of Peter and James, as well as the brethren at Jerusalem; so that there seemed to be a different decision, on the same point, by inspired men. On this account, it became necessary to appeal to Jerusalem. This circumstance explains the silence, on this point, of Paul and Barnabas in the council. They left it to their brethren in the apostolate to speak, that the perfect identity of opinion in that body might be more strikingly manifested. It has been objected,

2ndly, That the object of the church at Antioch cannot have been to obtain a decision upon the point from the Spirit of inspiration; because the reference was not to the apostles merely, but to the apostles and elders, the latter of whom were not inspired; and because the decree ultimately issued was from the apostles and elders, and *whole church*. I answer,

First, That whatever difficulty may be supposed to be involved in the fact that the apostles, in issuing the decree, associated with themselves the elders and brethren, the church at Antioch must have sought the decision of the doctrinal point from the inspired men at Jerusalem, since none but inspired men were qualified to give such a decision. I am not able to suppress my surprise at the statements of our opponents in reference to this council. They are compelled to maintain that the decree of the council did not emanate from the Spirit of inspiration ; for, in that case, it would obviously afford no pretext and no model for uninspired councils in the present day. It was, they think, an uninspired church court ; or, at all events, the apostles who were present did not act in their apostolical character, (what ! we may say with surprise, would they venture to declare a doctrine to be an integrant part of Christianity without the Spirit of inspiration !) but came to the decision as fallible men : and the decree was binding merely on the ground of its being the superior church court. Then why, we ask, did not the church at Antioch take the infallible opinion of Paul and Barnabas, whom they had amongst them, instead of seeking the fallible opinion of this council ? This was surely to take the worse for the better reason. It matters not that, in the council, there were more apostles than at Antioch, if they issued not this decree in their apostolical character. Our opponents seem to be involved in the absurdity of relying more confidently upon fallible than infallible authority. I answer, secondly, that the difficulty, *if any*, is common to the Presbyterians with us ; and, therefore, cannot be by them pleaded against us ; since, on their principles, the church, the multitude, the body of communicants, have no vote in a council : elders only possess authority, and the right of voting. I answer,

Thirdly, That there is no difficulty whatever ; for either, first, when the apostles pronounced the decision by the Spirit of inspiration, and the elders and church

of course acquiesced in it, the former may have associated the latter with them to prevent even the appearance of lording it over God's heritage. It seemed, indeed, good to all that the Gentiles should not be subjected to the yoke of circumcision; but the knowledge of the justice and truth of the decree in which that important doctrine was embodied, was obtained from very different sources:—by the apostles, from the Spirit of inspiration,—by the elders and church, from the confidence they reposed in them as infallible teachers. Or,

Secondly, As the object of the deputation was, as we have said, not merely to settle a point of doctrine, but a question of fact; and as both were decided in the letters sent to the churches, the apostles may be conceived, and, indeed, must be conceived, to have settled exclusively the point of doctrine; while the elders and brethren were only united with them in settling (and they only were competent to do it,) the point of fact. Hence the language introduced into the decree: "Forasmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words subverting your faith, saying ye must be circumcised, and keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment," &c., verse 24.

In closing the examination of this the only passage appealed to, within my recollection at least, as affording direct support to the Presbyterian form of church government, I would record the opinion that the cases are rare indeed in which a great system has been laid upon so slender and insecure a basis: for either the council was led to the decision recorded in its decree by the Spirit of inspiration, or it was not. In the former case, it furnishes no warrant for the holding of those courts of review which exist in that denomination. In the latter case, it proves that the private members of churches, as well as elders, are entitled to sit and vote in church courts, to the entire subversion of the system. If, indeed, the preceding pages contain a correct exposition of this much-disputed passage, of which the reader

must judge for himself, the fact will prove to be, that it affords no direct support to either of the conflicting systems; and no cautious reasoner will appeal to it for that purpose. The Congregationalist, by proving that the dictum of this assembly at Jerusalem was inspired, merely carries an important post of his opponent. His own system, at least that part of it which we are now considering, yet remains to be established.

In direct confirmation, then, of the second great principle of Congregationalism, viz., that every separate congregation has the full power of government within itself, there being no higher authority on earth, no court of review which can authoritatively confirm or reverse its decisions, I appeal, first, to Matt. xviii. 15 — 17: "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother; but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established: and if he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Now the reader is requested to observe that the decision of the church is here represented as final. As the last resort, the offence is to be reported to the church; and from their sentence there is no appeal, since, if they act according to the law of Christ, it is confirmed by Christ. Whatever, by church censure, they bind upon a transgressor, is bound upon him in heaven. Whatever, by acquittal or forgiveness, they loose on earth, is loosed in heaven. Now these words supply so direct a sanction to the proceedings of Congregational churches, that many, who have not much knowledge of other denominations, will perhaps be disposed to wonder how Presbyterians, who tell nothing to the church, attempt to justify their conduct in this respect. They generally, I believe, endeavour to relieve themselves from this difficulty by stating that, as a

body may be said to do that which is done by its representatives, the word church here means the *elders of the church*. There is an allusion, they imagine, to the Jewish synagogue, which consisted of two classes of persons; viz., *the people*, who met together to hear the law read and expounded; and *the rulers*, who presided, whose office was teaching and governing, and who had the power of excommunicating offenders. The direction, "Tell it to the *church*," means, therefore, tell it to the *elders* of the church. To the whole of the statement, I reply,

First, That it involves a departure from their own definition of the term church, viz., a number of separate congregations united under one form of government.

Secondly, That there is no distinct instance of the use of the word church, in this sense, in the New Testament. Our opponents even admit that it sometimes means a single congregation. It is certain, we maintain, that this is its general signification. It ought not, then, we contend, to be understood, without necessity, in this passage, in a sense which it no where else bears. Now, what shadow of necessity exists, we ask, except that it must be thus understood, or it subverts the presbyterian system? It should be added, also, that there is no proof whatever that the words of our Lord contained any allusion to the Jewish synagogue. It is not to be conceived, indeed, that they did so. "The word *ecclesia* was not applied to the members of a synagogue, but *presbuterion*. *Ecclesia* was used among the Jews, as we understand it, to denote the whole nation, or a particular congregation. *Ecclesia* meant the whole members of a congregation." "Tell it to the church" means, therefore, tell it to the congregation.

Thirdly, That, whatever the word church means here, its decision is represented as final. But when Presbyterians report the transgression to the kirk-session, *its* decision is not final: it is, therefore, not the church. When they transmit the same report to the presbytery,

its decisions, again, are not final : *it* is, therefore, not the church. The decision of the highest court only is final. Should Presbyterians say that this highest court is the church, we would ask why they report the offence to the presbytery at all, when our Lord has enjoined that, after the expostulations of the two or three brethren have failed, the affair should be carried directly to the church? It is impossible to reconcile this passage with that subordination of church courts which exists among Presbyterians.

Fourthly, That the Presbyterian practice of submitting the decisions of a particular congregation, or of the kirk session of that congregation, to a higher court for reversal or confirmation, may lead, and frequently does lead to the painful and perplexing result already referred to, page 79; viz., that a person expelled from the communion of a particular church, with a full conviction of all on the spot that the decision is right, may be forcibly thrust back again into the body: and thus the great principle of Christian fellowship, (acknowledged to be such by such Presbyterians as are not connected with an establishment,) viz., a voluntary agreement to walk together in the faith and obedience of the gospel, is violated.

In further support of the second great principle of Congregationalism, I appeal, 2dly, to 1 Cor. v. 1—7, compared with 2nd epistle, ii. 1—5. Both passages refer, as the reader will recollect, to the case of the incestuous person in the church of Corinth. It must, then, be remembered that the epistles were addressed to the church, i. e., to the body of church members in that city,—that the apostle reproves that body for continuing the person referred to amongst them,—that he commands them to put him away,—and that, afterwards, when assured of his unfeigned repentance, he enjoins them to confirm their love to him. Let the reader bear all this in mind, and ask himself, whether, while these passages go directly to the subversion of the Presbyterian, they

do not bring powerful support to the Congregational system of church government? He will perceive that they sustain the two following principles of Congregationalism :—

1st. That the private members of a church have a voice in, and some power over, the exclusion and restoration of offenders. In the 9th verse of the 2nd chapter of his second epistle, the apostle thus writes : “ For this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.” His previous injunction to put away this person, had been intended by him to be the test of their obedience ; and their conduct had shown that the spirit of obedience reigned amongst them. But how could it have been a test of obedience, if, as a body, they had possessed no power whatever over the expulsion of the offender, and his subsequent restoration?—if the decision had so rested with the elders, as that even the opinion of the body, in regard to his exclusion, &c. (which is the case, as we have seen, among Presbyterians,) was not even to be asked? Might not the apostle, with equal propriety, have commanded the servants of a nobleman to dismiss one of their fellow-servants, and to do it as a test of their obedience to him, while the whole power of dismissal was vested in the master?

Presbyterians have attempted to neutralize this argument in the following ways :—

First. Some have alleged that the apostle did not censure them for neglecting to exclude the incestuous man, but for not stirring up their elders, by their mourning, to put him away. It is difficult, however, to suppose that this answer will be relied upon by any respectable and candid man ; for, in that case, the chief blame of retaining the incestuous person would have rested upon the elders. Can it, then, be imagined that they would have escaped direct censure for the greater, while the church received censure for the lesser evil? Further : how can it be supposed that the apostle would

have thus indirectly censured the elders, by censuring the church for not stirring them up to their duty? When a magistrate proves negligent, the government is not in the habit of writing to the inhabitants of the district in which he resides, and of endeavouring to make its censures reach him through them: it transmits its rebuke to the offender himself. Paul would not have acted differently. Again: if the only fault of the church was not stirring up the elders to the duty of "putting away that wicked person," how did it happen that the "apostle did not blame them for not *speaking* to the elders, but for not *mourning*, as if mourning was the only way of stirring them up?" And, finally, would not any attempt by the lay members of a Presbyterian church, to stir up their elders to the discharge of their duty, be regarded as an act of insubordination?

Secondly. Others have affirmed that the incestuous person was excluded by Paul, and not by the voice or consent of the church. He interposed, they affirm, by his apostolical authority,—pronounced the sentence,—and called upon them to execute it. To this objection we reply, that we are ignorant of the difference assumed in this answer, between pronouncing and executing a sentence of exclusion from a Christian church. The individual in question had been admitted to the Corinthian church by the consent of the body: when that consent was rescinded, was he not, by the very act of rescinding it, excluded? What remained to be done to complete the expulsion? Were the brethren to expel him *vi et armis*? or were they, and not the elders, to convey to him official notice of his expulsion? Again, we answer, that if our opponents could establish a distinction between a sentence of excommunication and the execution of it, the distinction would not avail them, because Paul did not, as they allege, excommunicate the offender. He commanded the body to whom he wrote to do it. "Purge out, therefore," is his language, "the old leaven," v. 7; and in the second epistle he informs us

that the punishment was inflicted by many; which punishment was obviously excommunication.

Thirdly. Some have ventured to assert that the command to purge out the old leaven was addressed to the elders only. We have no hesitation in replying, that no candid man, who carefully examines the chapter, will believe this. It cannot be doubted that the same persons are addressed throughout the whole chapter: so that, if the elders only were enjoined to purge out the old leaven, it would follow that they only are forbidden to keep company with fornicators, covetous, idolators,—to go to law with one another, &c. Does any one believe this?

2nd. The passages we are now considering sustain another great principle of Congregationalism, viz., that the decision of a separate church, i. e., of the pastior and private members, is a final one. Every thing in the history tends to show that it was final in the case before us. On Presbyterian principles it could not, however, have been necessarily so. It was the decision of an inferior court merely; from the sentence of which an appeal might have been demanded to a higher tribunal. There it might have been reversed.

3rd. In support of both these great principles, and indeed, of the Congregational form of church government generally, in contradistinction from the Presbyterian form, I appeal to the directions contained in the New Testament in reference to the reception of members into the church. In the latter denomination, applications for church-fellowship, letters of recommendation from one congregation to another, are presented to the elders, and decided upon by the elders exclusively. The church, understanding by that term the Christian body, have no right to express assent or dissent. They have no control whatever. They are merely apprised, on the one hand, that certain individuals have been added to their fellowship, by their appearance with *them* at the table of the Lord; or rather,

I should have said, with *a part of their number*, for they never receive the Lord's Supper in a body, (it cannot be said, for we being many are one,) but in separate companies; and, on the other, that certain others have been excluded from their fellowship, by their non-appearance at the table. At utter variance, as I believe, with this mode of proceeding, are, as I have said, the directions of the New Testament with respect to the reception of members; for they are directed, not to the elders, but to the Christian body. "Him that is weak in the faith," says the Apostle Paul, writing not to the elders merely, but the whole church at Rome, "receive you, but not to doubtful disputations," Rom. xiv. 1. When Saul, immediately after his conversion to God, went up to Jerusalem, he did not succeed, at first, in accomplishing his wish to ally himself with the Christian body. Why? Did the decision of the elders prevent his entrance into it? No, "the disciples were afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple," Acts ix. 26, (a strong proof, by the way, that the primitive churches admitted none whom they did not believe to be real converts to the Christian faith). When the eloquent Apollos was disposed to pass into Achaia, "the brethren" (the brethren, observe, not the elders exclusively,) "wrote" recommendatory epistles. And to whom did they send them?—Not to the elders, i. e., not exclusively to the elders of the churches to which they might find their way, but to the disciples,—“exhorting the disciples,” says the historian, “to receive him,” Acts xviii. 27. Such recommendatory epistles were not uncommon in primitive times, and they appear to have been of one form; i. e., they were attestations to the Christian character of the person who carried them, sent *from the church* to which he had formerly belonged, *to the Christian body*, not the elders exclusively, existing in the place whither he was going. Thus the whole church at Philippi were enjoined by Paul to “receive” their messenger, Epaphroditus, “with all gladness,” chap. ii. 29;

a similar direction was given also concerning Mark, to the Christian body at Colosse, ch. iv. 10.

Finally, in support of the same great principles I appeal to the directions, in regard to the exercise of discipline, which are given in the New Testament. In this, as in the case of the reception of members, the Christian body in the Presbyterian denomination have no control. The elders receive and reject whom they choose, without giving any account of their conduct to the church at large. At utter variance, again, with this mode of proceeding, we find the whole church at Corinth censured for retaining the incestuous person; and the whole church of the Galatians commanded to restore a man who had been overtaken in a fault, Gal. vi. 1—"Ye who are spiritual" (the term brethren cannot, then, mean the elders of the church, for they were not the only spiritual men) "restore such an one," &c. "In short," adds an acute, though not a very courteous and temperate writer, "of all directions as to discipline, of all the censures as to the neglect of it, in the whole of the New Testament, there is not one given to the rulers as distinct from the brethren. Would it not be a very unaccountable thing, if the rulers alone are concerned in discipline, that, in all the commands given on that point, they should never be named? that all the censures as to the neglect of discipline and abuses, which church rulers alone (according to the Presbyterian form of government) "could reform, should fall upon those who were neither guilty nor had the power of remedying, that those who alone should have borne the blame, are neither reprimanded, nor even mentioned?"

We may add, would it not be very wonderful, if there were a right of appeal from the decisions to which these churches were exhorted to come, that not one word should be said about it?

SECTION VIII.

THE DISCIPLINE OF A CHURCH.

By discipline, we understand the execution of the laws by which the church, as a Christian body, is, in all its proceedings, to be regulated.

It is, perhaps, not uncommon to restrict the application of the term discipline to the infliction of church censures. We use it more comprehensively, to denote the caution which should be exercised in the admission of members to the Christian body,—the care which should be put forth in watching over them after their admission to it,—as well as the infliction of the prescribed sentence, when the laws of Christ are violated.

1st. A church should carefully and conscientiously exercise the discipline of the Lord's house in the reception of members; that is, it should put in force the law of Christ in relation to this important practical point.

The law itself is, that none should be admitted into the churches of the saints but such as are adapted to promote the great objects of Christian fellowship; viz., those only who give satisfactory evidence of the possession of real religion. Having before, vide p. 6, endeavoured to prove that this is the law of the kingdom, I have now merely to call the reader's attention to the importance of putting it in force. The conscientious exercise of discipline, in relation to this point, is, we observe,

First, Essential to the honour of Christ and his religion. How greatly are both the Master and his cause

dishonoured when, in consequence of the imprudent, indiscriminate, or careless admission of members, little difference can be perceived, if any, between the spirit and conduct of those who are recognised as belonging to the body, and of others who are not.

Secondly. It exerts a powerful influence both upon the comfort and the spiritual progress of the members of the church. "A little leaven," says the apostle, "leaveneth the whole lump." No proverb demands more imperatively than this the careful consideration of Congregational churches; and there is no specific instance, perhaps, in which the general truth involved in it becomes so strikingly apparent, as in the case of the existence of unholy men and women in a Christian church. The admission of even a few persons whose conduct is irregular, or who give no evidence of the possession of real religion, tends to grieve the Holy Spirit; to clog all the proceedings of the church; to paralyze the whole body; to prevent the adoption of general measures for promoting its spiritual welfare; to wound the spirit, cool the ardour, and endanger the stability even of the most spiritually-minded of its members.

Thirdly. It is eminently adapted to promote the salvation of sinners. Few things tend more powerfully to prevent the success of the Gospel than a relaxation of discipline in reference to the admission of members into the church. Such as are visibly connected with the Christian body are avowedly religious persons. Should there, then, appear no marked difference between them, and obviously worldly men, how can it be otherwise than that the latter should be led to form false and degraded views of the nature and power of religion? To them it must appear a name and a pretence, and nothing else; and thus they are willingly deluded to their final ruin. But when the members of a church are recognised by others as a holy society, when they are both decidedly and visibly separated from the world, in reference to their principles of action and their manner of life, their de-

sires, pleasures, pursuits, conduct, &c., they lodge a powerful conviction in the minds of others, that religion is not a mere name; that it is a spiritual energy, and a spiritual change which they have not experienced, and of which, indeed, they have no conception: while the happy result, in many cases, is inquiry, conviction, and the cordial reception of the Gospel. It was when the churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria were walking in the fear of the Lord, that their numbers received so large an augmentation.

2ndly. The church should exercise discipline by enforcing attention to those laws which, by rendering it the duty of the members of the Christian body to watch over one another in love, are so preeminently adapted to advance both its comfort and its spirituality. We have explained the nature of this oversight: it only remains, accordingly, to show the importance of enforcing its exercise.

First. It tends to prevent and to check evil in a church. When the spirit of Christian watchfulness is awake and vigilant, it presents a strong moral guard against a departure from the truth in its principles, or spirit, or conduct. Every one feels that the eyes of the whole body are upon him—a position inconceivably annoying to a hypocrite, (and therefore a powerful test and revealer of character,) and, possibly, not very grateful to a lukewarm, and especially a backsliding Christian. But to a man whose supreme desire it is to be preserved from even the appearance of evil, the check will be prized; if eminently spiritual, it will be even grateful, and prove eminently advantageous.

Secondly. It renders it more easy to correct and subdue sin. Evils are detected at their commencement, and so more easily vanquished. Wavering of opinion, in reference to essential truth, is wisely dealt with before it has ripened into scepticism or infidelity; coldness is observed before it has sunk into settled estrangement and aversion; ambiguous or doubtful actions are

animadverted upon before they have drawn after them (as they are likely to do) others which must incur the total loss of character; the progress of the transgressor is arrested before he has reached the point from which retreat would be impossible. Thus sin, not being finished, does not bring forth death.

It is not to be doubted, we imagine, that a very large proportion of the evils under which some of our churches are labouring, result from the relaxation, or rather the total neglect of discipline, in this respect. The degree in which this evil prevails is such as to render it not impossible that the revival, and especially the exercise of the spirit of watchfulness, would be regarded, by some individuals of the body, as annoying and impertinent.

3rdly. A church should exercise discipline by executing the law of Christ upon offending members.

Discipline, in this point of view, aims to uphold the honour of Christ; to prevent any discredit becoming attached to religion; to awaken salutary fear in the Christian body; and to secure the repentance, and thus the pardon and salvation, of the offender himself. The latter is, beyond all question, the direct, if not the main object to be aimed at. It is, indeed, essential to the securing of all the rest. The glory of Christ, and the honour of his religion, are most effectually upheld and vindicated by the repentance and reformation of the transgressor. Let our aim be to secure this object, and we shall be less likely to fail in regard to others. And if such be our aim, we shall not, through the influence of mistaken zeal for the credit of religion, lay upon a transgressor a larger measure of church censure and punishment than the case requires. How can excessively severe inflictions do credit to the religion of love, or to the gracious Being from whom it emanated?

Let the laws of Christ be observed and executed. We shall in this way do more honour to him than by adding to the amount of punishment for the credit of his religion. He is wiser than we. Cannot He be

trusted to uphold his own glory, and the honour of his own institutions? Who are we, that we should condemn when the Master censures not, or inflict fifty stripes when the Master demands twenty only?

I have said that the exercise of discipline (which we are now contemplating, is the infliction upon the transgressor of *the sentence* by which the Great Head of the church *has guarded his own laws*. It will be found, it is imagined, of vast practical importance to our churches to remember this, to recollect that they are not legislators; that Christ has not invested them with authority to enjoin what he has not enjoined; to condemn what he has not condemned; or to seek to support his own laws by inflicting punishment, differing either in amount or in kind, from that which he assigns to disobedience. If a case of assumed transgression could occur in any church, with respect to which no general or specific directions could be found in reference to the mode of procedure, (no such case can however occur,) it could not in these circumstances act; for to act would be to *make* law, and not to *execute* law. Great benefit, as it has been said, will result from the practical remembrance of these statements. It will lead the churches to a more careful examination of the law and the testimony, that they may be prepared to act in any emergency. It will prevent the suggestion of various modes of proceeding, in reference to cases of offence, which do not even assume to have the authority of the New Testament in their favour: for when a person knows that he must support, by scriptural authority, the opinion he expresses in reference to the mode of proceeding, he will probably be less prone to speak than swift to hear. It will powerfully tend to secure a unanimous decision; for where conscience is in subjection to the word of God, and where that word is appealed to as the *exclusive* guide, there is not room for much diversity of judgment. It will give to a minister an influence in guiding the decisions of a church, which he can never obtain, and

ought not to attain, by a mere exercise of the prerogative; and, finally, it will clothe these decisions with a power of awakening the conscience of the offender, not easy to be resisted; for while the church, in obedience to the law of God, pronounces the sentence of expulsion, he will hear, proceeding from the mouth of the Lord himself, the terrible words, "Whatsoever my church thus binds on earth, shall be bound in heaven."

It is, then, necessary here to exhibit and expound the law of Christ in reference to offences. To effect this with advantage, we must consider the cases of private and public offences separately; for it will be found that the law, in reference to them, is somewhat different.

THE LAW WITH REGARD TO PRIVATE OFFENCES.

This law is recorded in the 18th chapter of Matthew, verses 15—17: "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother; but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established: and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a publican."

The reader will observe that the person trespassing is said to be a brother, i. e., a fellow-heir (or apparently such) of the grace and kingdom of our Lord;—the especial, though not the exclusive, reference being to a member of the same Christian church.

The trespass itself is not some apparent want of deference or respect,—some conceived slight, wounding to pride merely; but some act that is morally wrong,—some violation of the laws of Christian love in the conduct of one member of a church towards another. Nor is it a trespass which has God only for its object, but

man; for the words of the law are, "If thy *brother* shall trespass against *thee*." In this case,

The offended party is to go to the offender, and privately expostulate with him,—to do this ere he open his lips upon the subject to a single individual. He is to go to him with the single view of gaining his brother. He must, therefore, take especial care to divest himself of angry feelings, and proceed in the spirit of the purest Christian love.

Should private expostulation fail, he is still forbidden to render the offence public; for in no case does Christian love permit greater publicity than is necessary. He is directed to take with him one or two others, whose expostulations, added to his own, may be more likely to lead to repentance; or, if that should unhappily fail to prove the result, who may have it in their power to establish the facts of the case, should it be found necessary to report the matter to the church. It is of especial importance to remember here, that the persons selected to visit the offender should be men of acknowledged piety, wisdom, integrity, good temper, and prudence;—that they should not be relatives, or personal friends of the offended individual; and that the offence should not be stated to them till they come into the presence of the offender himself. Should this measure also fail, unnecessary publicity is still to be avoided. The offence must, indeed, be told to the church, but it must not be told to the world; and any member who refers to it without necessity, beyond the boundaries of that inclosure, violates the law of Christian love, and ought to be visited with the censure of the church. The church is to add its public expostulations to those which have been tendered privately. If repentance follow, the business is at an end. The members of the church are to renew their love to their penitent brother. In the case of impenitence, the offender must be solemnly excommunicated; and the other members of the body are to

shun all unnecessary intercourse with him. They are not even to eat with him. He is to be to them as a heathen man, and a publican.

Such is the law itself. Let the reader now direct his thoughts for a moment to the wisdom which it develops.

It has then, it will be observed, a happy influence upon the offender himself, being powerfully adapted to induce repentance and confession. When, on the contrary, the law of secrecy has been violated, the offender feels that his reprover is not without fault. Confession to others might not be impossible: to him it is so; and, instead of acknowledging his offence, it is well if he do not direct his reprover to pull out the beam that is in his own eye, before he attempts to remove the mote from his brother's eye.

Further, It has a happy influence upon the church, tending to preserve and promote a spirit of love in the body; to secure its purity; and to increase its numbers.

THE LAW IN REGARD TO PUBLIC OFFENCES.

In reference to this class of offences, we find the law laid down in the following words: "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear," 1 Tim. v. 20. It must be admitted, indeed, that the pronoun *tem* refers immediately to elders, who are mentioned in the preceding verse; yet, as there is nothing, in the nature of the case, to limit the application of the law to them, it must be regarded as a general direction. The sin of which the passage speaks is, doubtless, what we call a public, in contradistinction from a private offence; since private offences, whether committed by elders or others, come under the regulation of the law already considered. The words teach us, then, that public offences must be dealt with by the church at large. First, because, as they are not offences against any one individual, no one is specifically required, as in the former instance,

to go to the offender and expostulate privately with him. There is, however, a case of transgression of a medium character—when the offence is not strictly a public offence, i. e., it is not a trespass against any individual, nor strictly a public offence; since, though known to an individual or two connected with the church, it may not be known to the world—which must be dealt with according to the previous law. The spirit of that law would be most grossly violated, were the individual privy to the transgression to give publicity to it, even by carrying information to the officers of the church, before he had ascertained, by private conversation, the state of mind of his offending brother. Finding him penitent, the business should be regarded for the present as at an end. We say for the present, since, if by any unexpected means, the transgression should require publicity, it may become necessary to deal further with it. Secondly, public offences must be dealt with by the church at large, because the honour of Christ, as well as of his religion, and the safety of the Christian body, would not be sufficiently secured by private admonition. The reason assigned for tendering public rebuke, in a case which does not require excommunication, is, “that others may fear;” i. e. increase their watchfulness against temptation, lest it should lead them into sin. Now, this important end could not be attained by private measures. The offence should not, indeed, be made public for the sake of securing a salutary impression upon the church at large; but, being public, this is an advantage which the Head of the church does not permit us to throw away. I beg the reader’s attention, then, to the subsequent remarks on the following points.

1st. On the mode in which the church should, in reference to public offences, proceed.

The first step is obviously for the body to invest two or three individuals, suggested by the pastor, or otherwise, with authority to investigate; minutely and thoroughly, the facts of the case, that the church may

obtain sufficient data for arriving at an enlightened and a scriptural decision. It is conceived to be a point of considerable importance that this initiatory step be in no instance omitted, even when it is conceived that the facts of the case are fully known. It will often happen, that minute circumstances, not as yet fully disclosed, may affect the moral estimate we should form of the whole transaction. The individuals thus appointed should take especial care that, by full and minute investigation, they may be able to prevent any difference of opinion, in relation to the facts of the case in the subsequent proceedings.

The next step is to lay the case in all its particulars before the church. This should be done with great care and accuracy; and, accordingly, it will be generally expedient that it be done by the pastor; the individuals who had been appointed by the church to ascertain the facts, being appealed to, to confirm the correctness of the pastor's statements.

The pastor, the appointed teacher of the church, should then direct to the law or laws of Christ, which bear upon the case under consideration;—should unfold their meaning and application; and thus guide the church to a decision, which, being in conformity with the law of the Head of the church, will be confirmed by him. If the writer might venture to appeal to his own experience, he would add, be careful to remember, on this point, the following directions: *Let the pastor beware of leaving it to the church to suggest the mode of proceeding.* He has no right, no liberty to do this. He is the appointed ruler and guide of the church. He must not throw off a responsibility which he has taken upon himself. He ought, on ordinary occasions at least, to be able to direct the church; and if he is not, how qualified soever he may be to preach the gospel, he is not fit for the pastoral office. It will be found exceedingly injurious to leave it to the church to suggest the mode of proceeding. It tends to encourage

the spirit of democracy; it is almost sure to elicit various and contradictory opinions; and it greatly diminishes the probability of ultimate unanimity, so pre-eminently desirable in all cases of discipline. Further, *let the pastor take especial care to place the mode of procedure recommended by himself on the authority of some general principle or specific direction of the word of God.* If he do this, he will carry the concurrence of the church—if it be rightly constituted—along with him; for, in adopting his recommendation, the church will feel that they are obeying Christ. The plan of proceeding now recommended powerfully tends to enthrone Christ in the consciences of the people; and the ultimate decision to which they come, presents a beautiful instance, first, of their obedience to him who has the rule over them; and, secondly, of the obedience of the whole body—the pastor and the flock—to the exalted King in Zion. In fact, there is no other mode of proceeding which can be adopted. If no law could be found to bear upon the case in hand, then the church could not act without making law, which they have no power to do.

2ndly. Upon some of the principles ~~which should~~ guide the church in reference to the decisions to which they come.

The great general principle—and though its practical application will not be found unattended with difficulty, it is well to have the principle itself established—is, that penitents should be retained in their fellowship with the church; impenitents excluded from it. I can conceive of nothing that could justify the exclusion of a real Christian from a church of Christ. No sin, however aggravated, unless it should prove, as it may do, the absence of religion, or destroy the confidence of the body, can warrant the extreme measure of excommunication; since the individual put away is to be to his former brethren as a heathen man and a publican. I am aware that the injunction of Paul to the church at Corinth, to put away the incestuous person, without

directing them to ascertain previously the state of his mind, may appear, at first view, at variance with these statements. But that individual was living in sin: there could, in that case, be no repentance, because the crime itself was not forsaken. They were, accordingly, bound to consider and treat him as an irreligious man.

Penitents are, then, to be retained; impenitents excluded. Yet, as all sin tends to bring character into suspicion, and as professions of repentance, after transgression, may be expected to be universal, the practical application of this governing principle is sometimes difficult.

To form an enlightened judgment on the question whether the sin evinces the absence of religion, we must consider the circumstances in which it was committed:—the strength, unexpectedness, suddenness of the temptation, by which the transgressor was assailed, or the contrary;—the character and temperament of the transgressor;—whether his constitution, age, peculiar circumstances, &c., rendered him prone to the sin, or the contrary;—whether or not he had received warnings against it, &c. A man, who is overtaken in a fault, or who falls into sin through the influence of powerful temptation assailing him at an unexpected time and manner, and carrying him away before his better principles had time to rally and make effectual resistance, should, on satisfactory evidence of penitence, be restored. Gal. vi. 1. A man who displays habitually little fear of sin,—who took no care to avoid the temptation which overcame him,—and pre-eminently one who put himself in the way of it, should, generally at least, be excluded: no confidence can be placed in his professions of repentance.

When the offender is not excluded, it will be necessary for the church to administer, by the voice of the pastor, public rebuke. The welfare of the body, and the honour of religion, demand it. It may be added, also, that the willingness of the transgressor to submit

to public rebuke, is one of the most powerful tests of the sincerity of his repentance. A question has been raised, viz., whether suspension from church privileges is justifiable. I should be disposed to reply, never as a punishment. While the case of an offender is under examination by the church, before its members can come to a decision upon it, it may be justifiable, perhaps expedient, to suspend him, (though some very experienced ministers prefer leaving it to the individual himself to withdraw, or not, as he may think best,) and, perhaps, as long as the church remain unable to decide whether his conduct be compatible with the existence of real religion, it may be proper to continue the suspension. But, then, suspension is not inflicted as a punishment. The sin could not fail to bring the character of the offender into serious suspicion. His professions of repentance have not force to avert that suspicion; and the suspension is merely intended to afford better opportunity of judging of the principles of the offender, and the sincerity of his repentance.

3rdly. Upon the spirit and manner in which discipline should be conducted.

First, With manifest affection to the offender himself. In the proceedings of the church, there must be no display of personal exasperation, or resentment, or dislike. All must be done with an evident desire to reclaim the offender. If the conduct and decision of the church do not flow from love to him, or even do not appear to flow from this source, they will irritate and harden, and thus do injury rather than good.

Secondly, With strict impartiality. There must be no respect of persons: the rich and influential must not be screened. Nothing would more certainly incur the displeasure of the great Head of the church. The laws of Christ must be executed upon all; even though a prince, or a sovereign, should be the offender.

Thirdly, With great solemnity; because, first, Christ walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks. He is

present with the church (and this truth should be vividly impressed upon the minds of all the members) in all their deliberations, and carefully observes whether the spirit of obedience to him will succumb to the maxims of worldly policy, to the influence of wealth, to the supposed claims of friendship, or relationship, to private partiality, or pique; and, if he does not see it rise superior to any, yea, to all of these things, he will assuredly say, "I have somewhat against thee." Secondly, Because the church acts in the place of Christ. This should be made to appear in the most impressive manner. No decision must emanate, or seem to emanate from the church, as its original and exclusive fountain. It must be made to appear that it is Christ that restores, or rebukes, or puts away, by them. Thirdly, Because the decisions of the church, when governed by Scripture, are sanctioned and confirmed by the Head of the church himself. Whatsoever they bind, or refuse to forgive, on earth, is bound in heaven; whatsoever they loose on earth, is loosed in heaven.

No case of discipline should be proceeded in, or concluded, without solemn prayer for Divine direction; and the hearts of all should ascend to God in earnest supplication, that the execution of the laws of the kingdom may be rendered a blessing to the church, and pre-eminently to the offender himself. It will be expedient to remember that, when cases of discipline are wisely and properly conducted, they tend most powerfully to promote the spiritual profit of the body. The members of the body at large are impressively taught their moral frailty; and each departs from the place with the prayer of one of old upon his lips, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me."

4thly. When discipline has terminated in exclusion, the remaining members of the body are to avoid all unnecessary private intercourse with the expelled member. He is to be unto them as a heathen man, and a publican.

There is no harshness or severity in this injunction. It is the command of love, which forbids us, by countenancing a man in his fault, to incur the danger of hardening him in his transgression, to his final ruin. On this account, as well as others, it is a point of great consequence, that the exclusion of the offender should be effected by an unanimous vote of the church. When this is not the case, the dissentient part of the body may be unwise enough to express their opinions not only in but out of the church; and may even think it their duty to show countenance to one whom they regard as an injured man. And, when this is done, the discipline of the church can produce no beneficial result upon the mind of the offender. Where a church is not radically corrupt, a short delay in reference to the final decision will generally bring all to one mind in a case which ought to be a case of excision; and, in that case, the heart of the stoutest offender will be likely to quail before the sentence.

5thly. The results of inattention to discipline. These are disastrous in the highest degree. *To the church itself*: mutual confidence is shaken,—love declines,—zeal languishes,—torpor seizes upon the body,—the Holy Spirit withholds his influence,—and Ichabod will generally be found written upon the doors. *To the honour of Christ and his religion*: for nothing tends so powerfully to dishonour both as the neglect of discipline: Christ is by that means wounded in the house of his friends. *To the world*: sinners are not converted, for the minister labours in a field on which, through the misconduct of the church, God has forbidden the clouds to pour down water.

THE END.

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